

THE
LONDON READER
of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1814.—VOL. LL.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 7, 1888.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[BOATING ON THE BAY BY MOONLIGHT.]

THE BROWN LADY.

CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER seeing Gordon Holroyd shoot by her like a whirlwind, Linda still sat on the fallen log, immovable. Time was passing; the somorous old stable clock had long struck nine, and still she saw no familiar figure coming into view; but that evening Rupert Dacres had taken a short cut through some plantations, and stepped out on the drive suddenly, within about twenty yards of Linda's resting-place. Hearing a rustle and a quick, light footstep, she rose, and turned and saw him. As the moonlight displayed her well-known face, pale and thin from illness, taking her to be the ghost of her former self—a wraith evolved back to its haunts by his own persistent thoughts—he stopped short and made no effort to accost her. At length he said, as if speaking with a considerable effort,—

"Where—where do you come from?"

For the instant she could not reply, but pointed backwards, towards the house, with

her left hand. She was beginning to share her aunt's experiences. Twice during that very hour she had been taken for a ghost!

"Why do you come back? What brings you?" continued Rupert Dacres.

"I have come here to see you!" she answered, in a low voice, rather astonished at the distance of his tone and manner.

"And what can I do for you? You may be sure I will do my best—to—to—" and he stopped, and then went on hurriedly—"to see your memory cleared!"

"Memory! Am I so soon forgotten?"

"Not by me! Never by me!"

"You—you are talking very strangely, Captain Dacres, and you do not seem surprised to see me!"

"I am—excessively surprised!" he answered.

"But not pleased! And I thought you were my friend! It is for that sole reason I have come to seek you! You told me once—"

"That I would be your friend," he interrupted, "so I will, whatever I swore to the flesh I am ready to stand by to the spirit! Yes, and beyond the grave!"

"I don't understand half you mean! You have never asked me how I came here? how I escaped? how I am concealed?"

"No; but now I will ask you one question. Who did it?"

"Gordon Holroyd."

"Ah! I thought as much! And to think that he is my brother-in-law; for all I know he may have murdered my unfortunate sister! Give me some clue, some proof, that I may drag him to justice. Where has he concealed you?"

"He hid me at first in the old kitchens in the east wing!"

"And now?"

"Now I live very comfortably in the east wing, in a most luxurious suite, with my grand-aunt!"

"Your grand aunt!"

"Yes, known as the Brown Lady!"

"And now tell me, what I can do for you? I must get a search warrant of course!"

"I must sit down," said the supposed spectre. "I cannot stand any longer! Of course, you did not know, but I have been very ill!"

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"Very ill!" he echoed, rather helplessly. What would this extraordinary apparition say next?

"Yes, very ill! This is the first time I have been out. I can only come out after nightfall! Why do you look at me so strangely, Captain Dacres? Am I so very much altered?"

"Not—not as much as I expected," he stammered.

"As you expected! I wonder what you expected?" she said, suddenly taking the handkerchief off her head. "At any rate, I cannot stay long. I am afraid of the night air! I have had rheumatic fever!"

"You have had what?" he inquired, in a voice that was startling in its tone, and he came up quite close to her, and looked at her keenly.

"Fever—rheumatic fever—from cold and exposure in these vault-like kitchens. My aunt came and found me, and carried me off to her warm, comfortable room. If she had not done so I should have died."

"Died! and was she not dead? Had she not died? For the first time, a strange wild idea flashed through his brain. This girl might be no ghost after all; but as much alive as he was himself alive—but mad!

"Tell me what has occurred since last I saw you, Miss Delsfosse?" he said, very seriously.

"I will as quickly as I can, for I must soon leave you. I returned from the penny reading, and went up to my grandfather's room. He seemed asleep, and very still—unusually still. I dragged back the clothes; you know what I saw, and I screamed with horror. My screams brought Gordon Holroyd to the spot; he nearly strangled me, and he put a handkerchief to my nostrils, and I remember no more till I found myself alone, in a frightful vault, and there I remained two days—remained till a deliverer came and rescued me—the notorious Brown Lady. She is a human being, my grand-aunt Eleanor. She has lived in seclusion in the east wing for thirty-five years. My grandfather and the old servants were not only aware of her existence, but benefited largely by her liberal hand and deep purse. She has her own servants, her own resources. She goes about the house at will. She knows every panel and every secret passage! She wrested a packet of letters concerning me from my uncle Isaac, and I have brought them to you," handing him a little parcel, which he received in silence, for he was too thunderstruck to speak.

"This parcel also contains my mother's marriage certificate and my baptismal one. I want you to place all these papers in the hands of Sir Thomas Carlton. He will look after my interest."

"Can you not trust me to do that?"

"I can. But he will be best. Aunt Eleanor wishes it. You will help him, I am sure, and you will bring me news from the outer world, won't you? Tell me what people think about me?"

"Must I answer this question?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Well I for one believed you had been murdered by Gordon Holroyd. I am thankful he has one crime less to answer for, putting all else aside."

"And what do other people think?"

"They think that you murdered old Holroyd."

"I! Great heavens! Aunt Eleanor said so to me at first—I mean that people thought so; but still, even yet, they cannot believe it. What do they say?" she asked, incoherently.

"They say you murdered him—possibly in a moment of passion. Then, terrified at your crime, robbed him and fled, and was probably in America by this time!"

"What nonsense!" she cried. "What wicked nonsense! As if I would murder my only relative and rob myself, and run away from my inheritance!"

"True; but then you must remember that

people do not know that it is your inheritance, nor that you were anything to the family. I know it, and I know what folly their suspicions point to. But when you were not heard or seen for more than two months, and when no trace of you could be discovered from the night of the murder, I gave you up for lost."

"But when you saw me now, what did you think?"

"You will be rather amused when you hear what I took you for. I was so fully convinced that you were dead that I took you for your ghost!"

"Ghost! and that is the reason your manner was so very odd. I have been taken for a ghost twice this evening. Gordon Holroyd happened to see me and flogged his horse and galloped away like a madman."

"Ah, conscience makes cowards of us all; but it was not conscience with him. He has none. He was terror—pure and unadulterated. He believes he murdered you, and that you perished in the cellar."

"I should like to go out into open day and confront everyone, and tell all the world what I know about that wicked man!"

"You cannot tell yet?"

"Cannot you guess? Do you not know

that there is a warrant out against you? You would be taken up at once. Leave it to me. Let me act for you, and I will manage it quietly?"

"What will you do?"

"I will lay all these papers you have given me before Sir Thomas and his solicitors. This part of the business is easy, but another portion is more difficult. You must be identified as the child and girl who was brought up by Miss Mee."

"And that cannot be done till I come out of my hiding-place, and I dare not venture out, as you say, till my name is cleared," said the girl, in an accent of despair. "Oh! I see no end to it. I am tired of wishing that I had never been born!"

"Do not talk like that," said the young man, gravely. "I believe the clouds must soon lift, and that you will have many happy years before you yet. Why, you are not more than twenty years of age. You have all the best of your life before you!"

"And look at what my life has been this two years!" he said, standing up and speaking with sudden passion. "Misery, semi-starvation, a haven here for a time, the brutal murder of my only friend, and I accused of it, and obliged to hide like a fox in its hole. I am young, that is true, but what is the good of youth? Except Aunt Eleanor, I have not a soul in the world to care for, or who would care whether I lived or died?"

"You are wrong, Miss Delsfosse, and you know that you are wrong. I care very much. I was nearly mad when I was obliged to believe that that ruffian had made away with you."

"Then if you care, as you say, help me. Help me to free myself from all these meshes, or I shall go mad!" she exclaimed, putting her two little, thin hands to her temples with a gesture of distraction.

"Wait a little longer," he said, gently. "You say you are in comfortable quarters, and meanwhile I will leave no stone unturned to release you. You may rely on me for that. Gordon Holroyd is already in great difficulties for ready-money. I believe he has secreted all the bonds and the diamonds that you are accused of having taken. That in some desperate moment, when off his guard, he will pledge one or the other. And then we shall have him."

"And only then?" echoed the girl, despondently.

"I mean to consult a first-rate lawyer, and ask him if it would be wise to produce you now, and confront you with the real criminal. I dare not suggest this to you on my own authority."

"Very well, I must go now. Bring me

news soon," said the girl. "When will you be here again? You see," she went on, with a sort of grim playfulness, "I do not mind making appointments with you, as you are a married man!"

"Don't!" he exclaimed. "Don't speak of that! Do you think I need to be reminded of it? Do you think I ever forget her? I wish I could!"

"Forgive me! It was cruel of me to say that, but somehow fate has been so remorseless to me that I feel as if I must be cruel to somebody; and now good-bye!"

"May I not come with you? May I not see you back to the house?"

"No, no! Who knows whom we might meet. And although my aunt and I both pass as ghosts. You are well known to be in the land of the living, and your company would betray me. It is seem strange, and harsh, and hard, forgive me! Those two awful nights, and—and everything!" and she shuddered violently. "That dreadful sight, all seems to have hardened me, and turned me into another creature, and turned me into stone!"

And with a quick nod, she turned her back upon him, and was speedily lost to sight among the increasing darkness and the surrounding trees.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"There is one thing we have to consider, Aunt Eleanor," said her grand-niece, as they fought their way by moss-grown, dimpled paths towards an equally unknown door that led into the pleasure-ground. "When my story is made public, your existence will be made public also! You will not wish for that, I know; but what is to be done? I cannot pretend that I have existed alone, and without food, for two whole months! No one would believe me!"

"I have considered the whole question most carefully, and, of course, I must come forward—come out of my concealment, figuratively speaking. I do not mind. You have done me good, Linda!—I shall always call you Linda. You have found a spot in my stony heart. You have given me a human interest, and my brightest sympathies were with characters in my books. Now they are with you; through you I shall live, and love and enjoy existence! By the way, what did you mean by telling Dacres that he was a married man?"

"I meant what was true," responded the girl, and in a few rapid sentences she sketched out his melancholy story.

"Unfortunate wretch! It were better for him he were dead, that he had hanged a millstone about his neck, and drowned himself! I am sincerely sorry!—sincerely sorry and dreadfully disappointed!" she said, waving about her hand as she spoke.

"Disappointed?" echoed her niece, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes. To tell you the truth, I had schemes. I had castles in the air, and now you have shattered them to atoms! My beautiful castles are in ruins!"

"What castles in the air?"

"I thought that Rupert Dacres would make an excellent match for you!" said the elder lady, bluntly. "He is a gentleman; he has good blood in his veins. The two places join; in short, there was everything in its favour!"

"Excepting that he had a wife already," said the girl, with a short laugh. "I wonder what Sir Thomas Carlton will say when he hears all that Captain Dacres has to tell him?"

"He will probably come down here and insist on carrying you away to London. If he wishes to take you with him you shall go. Here you are, as it were, tied hand and foot; you can do nothing."

"And supposing that I am arrested?"

"And supposing you are not arrested? Believe me, all will go well with you yet. I feel it; I know that the clouds are lifting!"

she concluded, emphatically. "And now let us make a truce with serious talk; and discuss the excellent little supper that Minna has provided for us. I am sure you are hungry after your ramble."

The round table was covered with a very choice meal—salmon, cold lamb; mayonnaise, piles of tempting strawberries, Devonshire cream, and a bottle of rare claret, and another of iced Hock.

The Brown Lady partook of her food as mysteriously as she did everything else.

Having helped herself to some small portion, she turned her back deliberately on her niece, and ate her morsel at a little side-table, talking all the time to Linda as composedly as if she were her *vis-à-vis*.

The Brown Lady was a true prophet. In a few days' time—much less than a week—Linda received a note from Captain Dacres, asking for a meeting.

"He had much to relate," he said, as he accosted her cordially. "Sir Thomas was full of energy and zeal, and was coming down immediately to remove her to his own house in Grosvenor-street. He was coming the very next evening at nine o'clock. He would meet her in the Beech Avenue. A carriage would await them at the North Lodge, and they would be whirled up to London by the night mail. Once there, it would be much easier to proceed against Gordon Holroyd."

"What are we to do?" asked Linda, somewhat startled by this sudden flight.

"You are to be taken before a magistrate to make a deposition. Your aunt will be required to give evidence too."

"I am sure she will never—never go to London!"

"I am sure she will when she knows how much depends on her. She will come up with you to-morrow, or I am greatly mistaken. I hear that Mr. Isaac Holroyd has had another stroke, that his mind has completely given way, and he has lost the power of speech."

"Really! We have not heard. We hear very little."

"And I have something to tell you about myself also," continued Rupert Dacres. "There is a chance—just a remote chance—that I may be a free man after all."

Linda said nothing, but looked at him fixedly.

"Would you not like to hear about it?" he asked, with a tinge of disappointment in his tone.

"Yes; of course I should."

"The day after I last saw you I went up to town by the afternoon train, and we were delayed on the line by an accident. A passenger on the down line had run into a goods, and we heard that it had been a shocking smash, and that the sides of the embankment at either side of the line were covered with dead and dying."

"Our train was at a standstill, but an engine was sent on ahead with a couple of doctors to render assistance, and I volunteered to go with them as a sort of impromptu assistant. I have good nerves, and have been on more than one battlefield, and I knew they would want some one to help to carry the wounded, to tear bandages, and all that sort of thing."

"We got to the place in about half-an-hour, and I won't harrow your feelings by describing what we saw. Among many others dreadfully injured was an engine-driver. He was frightfully scalded, poor fellow! I helped to carry him and to dress his wounds, and I was left, to a certain extent, in charge of him. He was in great agony, a big, hulking chap, like a navvy, but as patient as a woman. We moved him gently to a farmhouse close by, and I sat up with him, and three or four other cases all night but most of my care was for him, for we were afraid he would go off before morning. However, he did not; he rallied, and he noticed me, and said, 'You're a good chap, whoever you be. I'd like to know your name!' so I told him. He stared at me for a long time, and then he said, 'Were you

ever in India?' I told him that I was. 'Was I ever at a place called Korai?' I said yes. 'And did I know a young woman called Posie, a station-master's daughter? I have it all—' said he. 'And you're the gentleman she married? Poor devil! And you really married her?' I admitted that this was unhappily but too true.

"He was too ill to say more or to be questioned, but after a long silence he said, as if talking to himself, 'I thought it a roaring lark then, I think it a thundering shame now. Gentleman, chap, you have done a lot for me, and if I don't die you will have cause to be thankful!' Then you know something of Posie? I asked. 'Know? Yes, I know a good deal. I was on that line of rail; I was engine-driver for two years. I had grand pay—three hundred repees a month and all found; but the heat was awful, was too dear at the money, so I came home.'

"After this we did not talk any more, and I came away. The next day, you see, I had *your* affairs to attend to, as well as my own, but I sent a trained nurse to take my place, and gave the doctor *carte blanche* for expense. I am doing all in my power to keep this man alive. I hope I would have done so under any circumstances, but I cannot help feeling frighteningly anxious about his recovery, for I have a half hope that he knows some secret that may knock off my chains!"

"I believe he has! I most fervently hope that he has! How was he when you heard last?"

"In a bad way—delirious!"

"Do not worry about me or my concerns any longer, I implore you!" said Linda, excitedly. "Go and spend *all* your time by this sick man's bed. A word or a whisper may release you. Go; promise me you will go?"

"Shall you be glad if I am released?" he inquired.

"Can you ask it? Of course I shall be glad. All your friends will be glad."

"My friends know nothing about it," he returned, rather shortly. "You and Sir Thomas Carlton are the only two in the secret."

"And are not *we* your friends?"

"Yes, you are my best of friends—my best friend!"

Sir Thomas Carlton was as good as his word. The very next evening he was waiting by the log in the Beech Avenue, and here he was joined by two ladies, both veiled, but one much more closely disguised than the other.

Rupert Dacres was right. With her niece's interest in view Aunt Eleanor had flung her own prejudices to the wind, and had resolved upon accompanying her to London. No one would have guessed that the tall slight figure clad in a superb paletot, trimmed and lined with sables, and wearing a fashionable—yes, a *fashionable*—bonnet under her thick Chantilly veil, was no more or less than the Brown Lady.

Her privacy was respected at Grosvenor-street. Her meals served in her own sitting-room, and no one saw her save Sir Thomas, his astonished wife, and Linda—until, under the charge of the family lawyer, she and her grandniece went together, accompanied by Sir Thomas, and made a solemn deposition on oath, before a London magistrate. The result of this step was the issue of a warrant for the arrest of Gordon Holroyd on a charge of *wilful murder*!

* * *

Gordon was stepping out of the Pullman car which had brought him up to Euston, when he found himself tapped on the shoulder and taken in charge! Yes, taken in charge by a policeman in plain clothes, and carried off to the nearest station-house in a hansom cab. He was told that every word he said would be taken down, so he did not commit himself beyond a few violent imprecations. So the grave had given up its dead, to accuse him and bring him to the scaffold! Where

was the use of struggling any longer? He saw it all in his mind's eye; the long trial, the crowds of eager, staring faces, the sunning up, the black cap, the chaplain's visits, the last morning, *ugh!* Why not make short work of it all, and get it all over. But the instincts of self-preservation were strong in his heart still.

It was only after a long interview with a celebrated criminal lawyer, who had undertaken his defence, that he gave up hope.

"Is there not a loophole?" he asked, "not one legal quibble by which you could pull me through? Pull me through, and I give you fifty thousand pounds!"

"If you gave me fifty millions it would be all the same," said the lawyer, emphatically. "The evidence is dead against you. This girl, who turns out to be the late Mr. Holroyd's granddaughter, has put the noose over your neck!"

Here was plain speaking with a vengeance!

"Can you not bribe the jailers? Offer them five—ten thousand pounds a-piece! Offer them half my fortune!"

"The days of bribery of that kind are past, and, moreover, my dear sir, you have *no* fortune! What you deem yours is entirely the property of Miss Linda Delafosse, your cousin. Her whole case is clear as day. She has produced all the necessary papers. She has been identified. She is the mistress of Carrisbrooke!"

"I was sorry once, when I thought I had killed her! Now I'm sorry—sorry beyond words, that I did not make an end of her at once! Dead girls tell no tales!"

"I cannot assist you I see, and I cannot listen to this kind of talk. It is quite unprofessional," said the lawyer, rising. "Making every allowance for the disordered state of your mind I cannot stand it."

"Can you give me no help—no suggestion?"

"None, unless you choose to plead insanity! Your deeds were certainly those of a madman!" and so saying, with a formal inclination of his head, he withdrew, leaving the miserable culprit to his own devices.

The next morning he was found dead! He had been beforehand with the executioner; he had hanged himself from the window-bar in his cell by means of his braces. On the table was found a slip of paper on which was scrawled in a trembling hand,—

"I did it! I strangled my uncle in a fury of passion because he refused me money.—G. Holroyd."

Gordon Holroyd's suicide was hushed up. It was not printed in large capitals on posters setting forth the latest news; but squeezed into an insignificant little paragraph in some obscure corner of the paper. The Holroys had hitherto been an honourable family, with a stainless name, and owing to Sir Thomas Carlton and Squire Dacres's interest, it was dragged through as little mud as was compatible with justice.

There was no doubt of this wretched Gordon's guilt. There had been a strict search at his lodgings. The bonds, notes, and diamonds had all been discovered. Even without Linda's evidence his guilt was clear, and Linda Delafosse was now a great heiress. She felt almost frightened at the extent of her possessions, and was rather astonished at the number of people who now came forward and claimed to have known her and befriended her in her days of poverty—old neighbours from Marmister, Mr. Mees, who had robbed her, the landlord and landlady of the "Blue Cow," and, finally, her friends from the crockery shop. Mrs. Dacres and her sister made a friendly call in Grosvenor-street, and assured her, in most gushing terms, that she was more than a heroine of romance, and that they had always discovered something most interesting in her appearance, and had a conviction that she was a species of princess in disguise!

These ladies had visions of a young neighbour at Carrisbrooke of balls, theatricals, and

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beuse-parties during the shooting season, and considered that it would be prudent to be on good terms with the fair mistress of so much property and so many pounds.

But Linda Delafosse had taken a temporary dislike to the home of her ancestors, and was going abroad immediately with Sir Thomas and Lady Carlton. The latter was bubbling over with pride and self-satisfaction — her round, good-humoured face literally beamed. "I told you so," for had not she discovered the heiress of the Holroys in an insignificant stationer's shop?

CHAPTER XXXII.

And all this time what had become of Rupert Dacres? He was not among the circle of old friends who had rallied round the heiress with eager congratulations.

When he had known that she was reinstated, was received into the bosom of the Carlton family, was rich and presumably happy, he had set to work diligently upon his own affairs.

The disabled engine-driver recovered consciousness in time, and frantic as was Captain Dacres's impatience, he scorned to press or hurry a sick man. His forbearance had its due reward.

As he sat one evening by the invalid's bedside, that invalid said in a feeble voice, —

"I expect you are pretty anxious about a thing I have on my mind, and the sooner I speak the better you will be pleased."

"Yes, that's true," assented his listener. "If you are going to tell me anything that will help me to my release."

"I guess I can about do that. I knew Posie long before you did. I knew her when she was not a bad-looking girl of seventeen. She must have been nigh thirty when you come across her?"

"Yes."

"And if you had not been so precious green—excuse me, sir—you might surely have guessed that a girl would not get to that age in India without having a husband—ay, or maybe two—in her class. Decent-looking white girls is scarce, and are snapped up directly. Posie was married when she was about seventeen."

Captain Dacres leant back and passed his handkerchief across his forehead. His heart beat pretty quickly, so much depended on the next few words. Was Posie's husband alive or dead?

"She married my stoker, Bob Burrows, as decent a chap as ever drew breath, and sober. It was a good match for her, for he was drawing his two hundred rupees a month. At one time I'd a notion of Posie myself."

"And this Bob Burrows?" interrupted his listener, impatiently.

"He is an engine-driver now on the G. I. P. railway, and lives at Jubbulpore."

"Lives! Are you sure?"

"Well, I'd a letter from him six months ago, and he was alive then and doing well. You see he could stand the climate, and I could not."

"And how am I to get hold of him?"

"Well, as it is an important matter, and as you ask me, sir, I'll stop at nothing; but go out yourself, the fox being his own best messenger, and I'd fetch Bob home and give that wife of his a term for bigamy. We heard she'd married again—a rich young officer—and that the family had managed the business very neatly, and it were nothing to me. I heard the name and all from another gal of mine, who was a guard on the line, and when you told me your name somehow I guessed who you were."

"And do you mean to say this Bob Burrows actually allowed his wife to marry again with his consent?"

"I don't know that he ever heard. He never wanted to hear aught about her. He got four years' imprisonment for her, and I expect he thought that plenty."

"How? What do you mean?"

"Well, I mean, as Tom had a hot temper, and she drove him nearly mad by all accounts. He was a careful man, and she half ruined him. She ran up bills all over the place—and on the sly, too. She was forever dressing and flirting, and gadding whilst he was working, as you may say, his nails off! He would come home after a long spell of duty and find no dinner, no breakfast, the house upside down, and she out. He threatened her with all sorts of things, and it was no good, and one day he took out his revolver and fired at her. I believe he only did it to give her a good fright, or maybe to get rid of her, for the bullet never went near her; but, anyway, she tore screaming into the road, as was natural, and the police took him, and he got four years in Allahabad jail. However, he said he would sooner be there than at home with Posie. Posie went back to her family, and I don't know what she did till the time she came across you."

"You will give me this man's address," said Captain Dacres, "I shall start by the next mail."

And start he did, and in three weeks' time he was in Jubbulpore railway station, asking for Bob Burrows, engine-driver. Bob was "off" just then, and was at home in a neat little bungalow near the line, smoking in his shirt sleeves, and seated in the verandah when this unexpected visitor suddenly appeared before him.

At first Bob was surly, and not inclined to afford assistance or information; but after a while he became more genial, more especially after he had perused a letter of introduction from his pal at home, and the interview concluded most satisfactorily. Bob was prevailed upon to take leave and go home. All expenses were handsomely paid, and who shall paint the scene when Posie was confronted with her two husbands, a policeman, and a solicitor!

She screamed, swore, protested, and even tore her hair, declaring "it was all a plant, and she had never laid eyes on that 'ugly baboon,' meaning Burrows, 'in all the course of her life';" but facts are stubborn things.

Posie was not prosecuted, but was returned, carriage paid, to her relatives in India, and a "bugbear," that had weighed upon Rupert Dacres for the best years of his life, was removed at last.

Quite accidentally (?) he subsequently came across the Carrolls and Miss Delafosse at Naples—nay, put up at the same hotel, visited Pompeii and climbed Vesuvius together, spent a delightful fortnight at Sorrento. When the old people were dining the young people were strolling about the lanes, or boating on the bay by moonlight; and at the end of their sojourn Sir Thomas and his spouse were really quite unaffectedly surprised, to hear that these two young people had decided to boat and stroll and pass the remainder of their lives together! In short, that they were going to be married. Well, there was nothing to be said against it—(no, not now)—and it was in every respect a most suitable and desirable match!

* * * * *

Five years have passed. The tragic event at Carrisbrooke was worn out of people's minds, the place looks brighter than it ever did before, the sound of children's pattering feet echoes up and down the long passages. Isaac Holroyd is still alive, and is to be seen on sunny afternoons on the sunny side of the gardens, in his bath-chair; but he is quite imbecile, and greets everyone with the same fatuous smile, and occasionally murmurs one sentence, and only one—the three terrible words that originally cost him his reason. He shakes his palsied head and mutters what sounds like, "I did it!" But as he did not do it, no one is quite clear as to what he means.

Linda and Rupert are excessively happy, and make a good use of the wealth that has been allotted to them; for Squire Dacres, has

been gathered to his forefathers, and the two estates are now, as it were, one.

Maria Cotton bears an undying animosity to Mrs. Rupert Dacres, which animosity sits very lightly on that lady. She says that "Miss Delafosse, or whatever her name was, angled for Rupert, and that he only married her for her money, and because the two properties dovetailed so neatly into one another.

Nan flourishes at the North Lodge. Mrs. Glubb still knows all the family secrets, and still hoards many.

As for Aunt Eleanor—great-aunt Eleanor—she occasionally joins the family circle—well and all. The mysterious entrance to the east wing is mysterious no longer. Little people invade her sanctuary—little people who knew where to find certain excellent sweetmeats and toys and funny picture-books. More than once these innocents have boldly asked—

"Why does you wear that funny thing on your face? Where is your nose?"

And she replies quite composedly,—

"I wear it, my dears, to keep me warm!"

The children accept the statement with unquestioning faith. They are very fond of their grand-aunt, who pets them tremendously, and tells them delightful stories. The little girl is named Eleanor after her, and promises to be a great beauty. The children sometimes call their relative "auntie;" but quite as frequently, and not knowing what old associations they are stirring, they speak of her to one another as the *The Brown Lady*.

[THE END.]

JUDITH.

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CHAPTER XXIV.—(continued.)

In a moment Judith recognised the light blue jacket and striped amber scarf that St. Quentin was wearing, and she was watching him anxiously as he approached the fence in front of him.

His pony, a little done from keeping up with others of stronger build, rose rather awkwardly at it and stumbled slightly as he landed on the other side. The next moment he had recovered himself, and was going at full speed along the piece of straight that constituted the finish; but those few seconds had seemed to the girl more like an hour as with strained glance she awaited the issue.

A sigh of relief broke from her lips as a prolonged cheer proclaimed the race to be over; and she turned away her head.

As to who had won it she felt no curiosity at all; she only cared to know that he was safe, unhurt.

Colonel Lea-Creagh's eyes had been fixed on her all the while in vigilant observance. His question had been answered, but whether truthfully or no he could scarcely determine; only surely never woman's face wore such a troubled, anxious look for the sake of anyone to whom she was quite indifferent. That St. Quentin had been tolerably attentive to her he knew, though unaware how far their acquaintanceship had gone; but now the thought flashed into his mind that if he were in reality his rival, he was a very formidable one.

As Judith turned she caught his enquiring gaze and blushed a vivid crimson, that the few incoherent words she stammered about "nervousness," and "the danger of racing" could not explain away.

Her hearer knew perfectly well that only on the account of one had she been concerned, that all the rest could only be secondary thoughts. He knew, and for the moment his flat uninteresting face became dignified by an expression of deepest sorrow, and he said quietly,—

"I see; there is no chance for me."

She knew too what it was he meant, and a

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quick disclaimer rose to her lips yet never passed them. It might be that his surmise was the correct one after all. At least she could not with any confidence deny it; even to herself she could not answer the question whether the doubt of his worthiness had arisen too late—whether she loved the man or no?

As the crowd round the winning-post dispersed, Judith and her companion were separated, the former going over to Mrs. Sherston's side, and remaining there, white and silent, for the rest of the afternoon; the Colonel mingling with some other men, outwardly much the same in manner, yet aware that he had lost something he could not even strive to regain. The pomposity of his deportment, the complacency of his expression, did not abate by one iota, none could have guessed what a blow had been dealt nor how bravely it had been borne.

He had dreamed a dream; hoped when he should have despaired; but now that the awakening had come, and he saw that all was over, he did not deceive himself with the idea that future happiness could ever efface the present misery. It had been his first matrimonial venture, and certainly it would be his last; never again would he ask any woman to share his fortunes. Until the day of his death Judith would remain the one love, the one cause of unselfishness his narrow life had ever known.

He was nearly the last to leave the race-course, and as he went along the Mall towards his mess, St. Quentin came out of one of the adjoining compounds.

The Colonel's face darkened angrily, as he noticed whose house it was he had just left, and he spoke out bluntly what he thought,—

"St. Quentin, do you think your attentions to Miss Holt are compatible with your friendship for Mrs. Hare?"

Utterly taken aback by the unexpected question, the younger man attempted to prevaricate.

"Your question is a strange one, sir. For over a year I have been friendly with Mrs. Hare. When I fall in love—"

"Can you honestly say you have not done so already? Miss Holt is a girl few men could see without admiring—well, loving is the proper term."

"And suppose I do love her?"

"Then you ought to be brave enough, honest enough, to do something for her sake. Give up Mrs. Hare altogether. I don't say there is any harm in her, but give her up."

"She is my friend," repeated the young man, doggedly.

Lea-Creagh shrugged his shoulders.

"There are friendships and friendships, and naturally every man judges by his own experience. Mine has not been a happy one in these matters. Some women there are, I daresay, who, from good comradeship, can throw off their womanhood, and be to a man what another man might be—only sweeter, gentler, and more sympathetic. Ask yourself whether Mrs. Hare is such an one, whether she would be willing to see you married, whether you yourself would care to see her on friendly terms with your wife?"

St. Quentin gnawed his moustaches in indecision for some moments before he replied sharply,—

"It is scarcely fair to discuss any lady as we are discussing these two."

With an impatient gesture, Lea-Creagh waived the objection.

"This is strictly between ourselves. I am speaking to you as a father might to a son. Of Mrs. Hare I only know the social qualities, and readily admit her attractions. It is on that account I warn you of a possible danger, because I know, to my cost, how difficult it is to be constantly with a beautiful and taking woman and not to succumb to her charms. Propriety, St. Quentin, is the very deuce! Take my advice, and cut the whole thing at once."

St. Quentin opened his mouth to speak

then closed it again so tightly that the cigar between his lips was jerked to the ground.

"I thought, sir," he said presently, "that you yourself admired Miss Holt?"

"So I did; so I do. I will not deny it for a moment, though I may as well tell you candidly, knowing that you will respect my confidence, that I have no hope in that quarter—none at all. She has told me so this very afternoon; and it is on that account I am saying all this to you. There are some women who rouse all one's worst qualities, for whose sake one could commit any crime, outrage the holiest laws. Yet—thank Heaven!—there are others whose influence has a contrary tendency. I feel as if I could bear the blow I have received to-day from Judith Holt's hands if I could only know her happy."

"And—and why have you said all this to me?" awkwardly, yet with dawning self-satisfaction in his face.

"Because I believe she cares for you, and she is worthy of more than a divided devotion in return."

St. Quentin lit a fresh cigar, and puffed away at it vigorously for some seconds before replying, his Colonel watching him anxiously all the while, trying to judge from his manner whether his words had had any good effect.

Just as they entered the mess gates the younger man stopped and grasped his senior's hand.

"I thank you, sir, for what you have said. Believe me, I appreciate your kindness. That Miss Holt is worthy of a better man than I am certain; but if she will have me I will do my best to make her happy. I don't think we men ever do ourselves justice until we live in earnest, and she is enough to make anyone put forth his best endeavour. I will remember your words. She shall never have reason to be jealous of anyone again."

He spoke warmly, carried away by his feelings; and even then, in spite of the sincere ring in his tones, Lea-Creagh found himself wondering whether any credence should be given to his protestations, experience having taught him that those who say least as a rule do most.

No further conversation passed between them then, and the Colonel went into the ante-room, and took up a paper as an excuse for prosecuting his thoughts.

He felt that he had argued well throughout; yet somehow he was equally assured that in the second case, as in the first, his words had had little or no weight.

A man must "dree his own weird," no outside efforts can restrain him; nor can he be spared the consequences of his own folly.

CHAPTER XXV.

MAKING TERMS.

It is said that many illnesses are rendered incurable by want of candour on the part of the patient at the outset; the dread of hearing the worst exceeding their hope of ultimate recovery by means of proper remedies.

If this be so, there must be some excuse for those who, conscious of a threatened disturbance in the quietude of their existence, lack the moral courage to sift the matter to bottom, and only consider how they can shirk the danger for the present, not how to avoid it altogether.

For a few days Mr. Sherston did nothing to test the truth of what Mrs. Trevor had told him, nothing to protect himself if the case were so desperate as he believed.

He wandered about aimlessly, with the letter addressed to Judith in his pocket, throwing furtive glances in her direction whenever they met, as though trying to determine from her manner how much she knew—how far she was to be feared.

But she, not certain that he had been warned, maintained her composure, and, in-

deed, was so full of her own cause for trouble as to be at times tempted to forget the more important task she had taken upon herself to perform.

There had not been so much to remind her of it lately. Mr. Johnson had not annoyed her, nor had he troubled Winifred too frequently with his presence; and relieved by the cessation of the actual pain his overlike attentions caused her, the girl seemed to recover strength and grow more hopeful about the future.

It even entered her head that he might be regretting the bargain that, on her part, had been so unwillingly made, and the thought struck her that an appeal to be released might not be in vain.

Determined to lose no such happy chance from lack of courage, she seized the first opportunity of speaking to him alone. He was walking up and down in front of the house with the *Indian Telegraph* in his hand, when she stepped from under the shadow of the verandah and boldly joined him, all her heart upon her lips.

The air of resignation with which he folded up his paper and waited for her to speak disturbed her somewhat, but she was resolute to put her scheme into execution.

"May I speak to you a moment?" she began.

"I am at your disposal always," politely.

A slight flush spread over her thin features. She was looking weak still, but having been independent of the sofa for nearly a week, had ceased to be considered an invalid.

As he walked on quickly she did her best to keep up with his longer stride, though the exertion was evidently painful, and her voice sounded very unsteady as she went on,—

"I have been thinking that when you asked me to marry you, you may have spoken without due consideration—without knowing me as I am—without knowing others. There must be so many far more fitted for the position of your wife—prettier, pleasanter in every way—and you may have repented of your choice!"

"Do you imagine I should tell you if I had?"

"But, indeed, that is just what I wish that you should do. I am not very young; I do not care for gaieties nor society of any sort! How could I blame you if, since you spoke to me first, you had seen all my faults—and were sorry?"

He laughed outright at her eagerness—a harsh, discordant laugh, that contained more mockery than merriment.

"You are not to get rid of me so easily, Miss Winifred! Ours is a marriage of convenience, and neither must expect too much from the other. Now, were it a question of love—"

"Why should you not marry for love? You do not even pretend to care for me!"

"Because I cannot afford luxuries."

"And I am not rich. You know as well as I that my father lives up to his income, and that very little will be left for me!"

"That does not concern me in the least. I have money enough for both."

"Then why?" She started, and stopped as suddenly, persuaded of the utter hopelessness of the case; but it suited him to answer, and he did so with apparent good-humour.—

"Because you are your father's daughter, and I prefer to have a wife whose connections are well known, whose position is assured in the country where I mean to settle for good. Moreover, notwithstanding money is power, and can buy most things nowadays, I am afraid I must not blind myself to the fact that not to every one should I be acceptable as a suitor."

This undisguised cynicism, and the swift glance of amusement that sped from his half-closed eyes, sent a violent shudder through her frame. She stood still, feeling she could not walk another step; and he stopped also, curious as to what she would say or do next.

"You mean that I am bought and sold,

and that I must look for no mercy at your hands," she cried hysterically.

"If you choose to put it baldly, I would rather say that I am too ardent a lover to relinquish a prize I have only with difficulty won. I feel more inclined to cement our bonds than loosen them, even a little. This very day I mean to speak to Mr. Sherston, to implore him to fix an early date for our marriage. You would not wish to pain him, and vex me by any appearance of unwillingness?"

He leant forward to look into her pale face, but she kept it turned away, so that he might not read the agony of disappointment which was written there. She had built too much upon this appeal, and failure seemed almost too hard to bear.

"May I venture to hope that I carry with me your good wishes for my success?" he persisted remorselessly, and tried to touch her hand.

"What does it matter? To-morrow or next year, it is all the same!" was the bitter retort, and laughing a little recklessly she broke away.

With a self-satisfied smile, he walked on slowly to the other side of the house, where was Mr. Sherston's private room. Winifred's prayers had had so little effect that they had not even roused his anger. Every cruel word had been spoken in cold blood, and with the deliberate intention of preventing a repetition of such scenes. He wished her to know on what terms they were to stand, and to distinctly realise that she must never attempt to work upon his feelings, nor question his decrees. All emotion must be "crushed" out of her, and her spirit absolutely broken before she could be the use to him that he intended.

An expression in which was unusual warmth, even some tenderness, flitted across his face, as he thought of how Judith would have answered these conditions; and an overwhelming, impulsive feeling came over him, that, for her sake, he would have been content to give up all his schemes of self-advancement, happy in being mastered by love, rather than rule through fear.

He worshipped her so passionately that, had he possessed a hope, he could have sacrificed all to call her his; and yet so deeply rooted were the self-seeking instincts of ambition, so hard and unscrupulous was his nature, that before he had turned the handle of the door, and passed into the Commissioner's room, he had persuaded himself that, after all, he was best satisfied with things as they were.

His manner was suave in the extreme, as he asked if he were intruding, and offered, if this were so, to come some other time.

Mr. Sherston put away some letters he was writing; and, without rising, pushed a chair towards him.

"I have nothing in the world to do! Say what you have to say now," he said, quietly.

Something of superiority and patience in his tone irritated Mr. Johnson, and he retorted, bluntly.—

"It is on your business I have come. It is nothing to me—if all the world knows my real name, and the reason of my being in hiding here!"

"Pshaw! You are too hasty, my good fellow. You and I cannot afford to quarrel, our interests being the same."

"But are they the same? I am not sure. I often think it would suit my purpose better to make a clean breast of that Chahpore bribery business, and start fresh with a good name."

But the Commissioner, whether disturbed or not by the implied threat, was not the man to be brow-beaten with impunity. He toyed with his glasses a second or two before he remarked, thoughtfully.—

"Do you think you would gain by that? It is my honest opinion that the position of Mr. Johnson, globe-trotter, reputed millionaire, and guest of the Commissioner of Jaal,

pore, is a more enviable one than could be that of Michael Straughan, deserter from the 9th Lancers, and whilom my head clerk, even if it were proved that he only took a secondary part in that affair, consenting to bear all the onus—for a consideration."

"You take matters with a very high hand," angrily.

"I never knew any good done by playing too low. You know I am willing to do anything in reason to mark my gratitude for a service you did me over twenty years ago, but it would do neither of us any good, and probably disgust us both, were I to affect a subservience I do not feel."

There was a certain dignity in his manner as he spoke that impressed and subdued the other in spite of himself. At that moment he felt he was only Michael Straughan, the shock-headed Scotch clerk, who had been honoured by a word of commendation from his chief, and thought it no shame to stand bareheaded, cap in hand, while he passed through the room.

"You talk of gratitude!" he observed, disparagingly. "But what have you done for me, after all, in return for what I risked for you?"

"A great deal! Too much, I sometimes think. I have introduced you to my friends, taken you into my house, and have suffered you to become engaged to my daughter!"

"An engagement is one thing, marriage is another! When is the wedding-day to be, Sherston?"

"I almost doubt it coming off at all!" was the quiet rejoinder.

"What do you mean?" blankly.

"I mean, Straughan, that I think your game is exploded. You have been recognised, and they are seeking proofs to convict you! It is a mere question of time now, I should say."

"My ruin means yours too!" he declared, malignantly.

"I know that. I neither ask nor expect any generosity at your hands!"

"I'm glad of that; for there is a satisfaction in bringing down some one with you when you fall. That, I am sure, I could not resist. Who do you say is working against me? But I need not ask. It is that beautiful fiend who masquerades as your daughter's companion."

"You have guessed rightly! Look at this," handing him a letter. "She has unearched my brother Gerald in the Kanowar bazaar; and you will see by this she is sure of his aid in the matter."

Even Mr. Johnson's assurance failed him as he read. He was perceptibly paler when he asked, with assumed nonchalance,—

"And Mrs. Trevor! How did she respond to the appeal that I presume was made?"

"She utterly refused to swear to your identity at all, though she informed me privately that she had recognised you from the first."

"That is strange! I never came across her that I remember; never spoke to her, of course."

"She saw you in church, probably, or playing cricket, I dare say. Women have tenacious memories when it suits them."

"And she is sparing me for the sake of you? She must have been very keen about you once, so still, perhaps; and in a pretty woman, too, and an attractive one!"

"Will you confine yourself to the matter in hand?" sternly.

"Ah! Well, you must forgive my digression. Only a woman—a pretty woman, be it understood—could have led me away from a subject that so nearly concerns myself. And, apropos of pretty women, now I wonder what on earth induced Miss Holt to take all the trouble to bring up that old, half-forgotten misdemeanour against me?"

Mr. Sherston hesitated.

He had never betrayed the fact that Judith suspected him to be her father's partner, disguised, and fleeing from justice.

Closely as their interests were allied, it may have been that he could not bring himself to

protect the man who, like a very Mephistopheles of cunning, had taken advantage of the one weak and wicked act of his life to prey upon him ever since.

"You know best what reason she may have to dislike you," he said, satirically. "It may be a merely personal distaste; women have very delicate perceptions, and she may have been a favourite with them, or she may have more serious reasons for her animosity. You may have known her father or her brother, robbed him, perhaps, as you robbed me. Remember, I know nothing of how you spent the interval between the time you left India, as Michael Straughan, and turned up again as Mr. Johnson with your fortune made. How I never inquired."

Mr. Johnson scowled darkly, and looked down his nose furtively, to see if the allusion to his possible knowledge of Judith's people in England were mere guesswork or deliberately intended. He learnt nothing from the Commissioner's impulsive face, and said, slowly, after a pause,—

"It is scarcely worth while speculating as to the cause of a woman's hatred. It would answer our purpose better to consider how we can disarm or conciliate her."

"Mrs. Trevor's idea is, that she is only working to prevent your marriage with Winifred."

Then as the other did not at once reply, Mr. Sherston added, quickly, more of restrained feeling in his voice than there had been before,—

"Why not give up the idea, Johnson? Anything else that is mine you need only ask for to have. It is not even as though you loved her, and on that account were prepared to risk some dangers for her sake. If anyone has ever touched your heart, it is Judith Holt."

A slight twitching of the man's thin lips showed that this shot had gone straight home; but Johnson was not the one to allow himself to be influenced for any time by a mere sentiment, a fancy.

"Love," he declared, sneeringly, "is an amusement for boys. Self-advancement is the serious business of life."

"With your money you might marry someone more calculated to help you on in society than Winifred."

"Might I? I doubt it. I am not one to give up substance for a shadow. My money is no use to me unless I have connections that are well-known, and of undisputed respectability. You are a noted man out here, and have the immediate prospect of rising higher. It will suit me excellently well to talk of my wife's mother, *Lady Sherston*!"

The Commissioner remained silent, disgusted at his future son-in-law's innateness. The servant came in with letters, and, during the short time that ensued, two or three were opened, read, and laid aside. Another was in his hand when Johnson broke in, impatiently,—

"All this is nonsense, and beside the question. I came in here to ask when the wedding was to be. If it is a fact that Miss Holt and your brother have joined together in an attempt to ruin me, the sooner it is the better, for they will certainly not extend their enmity to Winifred, and for her sake, if not on my own merits, I shall escape scot-free."

"It is Winifred's privilege to fix the day," said Mr. Sherston, in a hard, pained voice, feeling that he was entangled in a web from the meshes of which there was no escape.

"She will do what you tell her to do, of course. It must be very soon—at once. Why not to-morrow or the next day?"

"Impossible! It would only arouse comment, and my wife would never agree to it."

"Then in a week at latest. I warn you I will submit to no further delays nor subterfuges."

Mr. Sherston pondered the matter for a few moments; and then, in a tone that there was no gainsaying, he said, decidedly,—

"To-day is the first. The wedding shall be on the tenth. I promise you that, but not a

day earlier. I have something at stake as well as you—considerations that cannot be ignored."

He rose from his chair as a hint that the conversation was closed; and, with some muttered objections, Johnson accepted his dismissal, agreeing to the offered terms.

Only nine days remained, and in that time, surely, little could be done to shake his position or circumvent his plans!

CHAPTER XXVI.

BID ME GOOD-BYE.

ONLY nine days! When Winifred heard this the transient gleam of spirit which had given her courage to throw herself upon Johnson's mercy died out of her, at once; something else died too, without which life is scarcely worth the living—hope.

She moved about the house like a ghost, being scarcely conscious of her actions, and utterly careless of all that was going on; bringing Mrs. Sherston to the verge of desperation by the indifference with which she met all details regarding necessary arrangements, and especially the important subject of the trousseau.

Judith boldly preached rebellion, but Winifred felt too broken-hearted to resist; after that first signal failure being loath to make another effort. Besides which, she felt that having of her own free will promised to save her father from a danger of whose import she was unaware, she was bound to go on with her self imposed task. So the days fled, every one bringing nearer the inevitable end.

During the intervening week it entered into Mrs. Hare's head to give a moonlight picnic. The Sherstons were invited, and a separate invitation came for Judith, who, however, while sending a formal acceptance, having no excuse to offer as a refusal, inwardly resolved on no account to go; but at the last moment Winifred got one of her violent attacks of fever, and Mrs. Sherston absolutely declining to go alone, she was compelled to accompany her.

It was a lovely night, such a night as, perhaps, is nowhere known except in India, where the climate also permits of its perfect enjoyment; and as they drove to the appointed spot, Judith began to feel a pleasurable anticipation overcome her first reluctance.

St. Quentin would be there, she knew, and lately she had been thinking much of how they would meet, and on what terms, whether her instinctive distrust of him would be strengthened, or whether the attraction he had always possessed for her would surmount every other feeling.

A dozen times she had asked herself if she loved him, and each time the question had been dismissed without a satisfactory reply. Now, for the first time, she wondered if he cared for her, and the simple query sent the blood rushing to her heart, causing it to beat almost to suffocation; both of which symptoms might have seemed to some answer sufficient.

Judith, however, was unlike most other girls, and not having squandered her emotions on several different objects, was slower to come to a conclusion; to think of any man as her lover and beloved, was a new and wonderful sensation.

When they reached the meeting place they found all the other guests assembled, only waiting for their arrival to sit down to dinner; and Judith found herself placed between Mr. Johnson and St. Quentin.

From very shyness she addressed herself to the former, and he from pure malice,ness devoted himself to her in return, paying her such exaggerated attentions that she could scarcely contain her anger. Once in desperation, she turned to the man who was her lover, but met a glance so full of passionate reproach, that before she turned away again, and submitted to what before had seemed intolerable, with new patience. All that

Johnson was saying she could ignore; indeed, she scarcely deigned to listen, and only answered when common courtesy compelled a reply; but the question that burned in St. Quentin's eyes, could not so easily be set aside.

She felt that a crisis had arrived in her life, and the next few hours would decide whether she would give all her heart without reservation into this man's keeping, or return to her former state of comfortable indifference to the whole sex. The matter was too momentous to be settled in haste, or without due consideration, and this being so, she forced herself to look towards Mr. Johnson, and even speak to him now and then, rather than turn in the direction of him who was impatiently waiting to claim her attention.

When the meal was over, and the signal given to rise, she still kept her face averted, waiting nervously for some decisive action on his part.

"Shall we wander off?" asked Mr. Johnson, pleasantly. "Mrs. Hare has given out she does not mean to entertain us, we are to amuse ourselves."

"I don't think that would be exactly my idea of amusement," with a languid impertinence that delighted Mr. Manleverer, who was standing by. He had always had a sort of admiration for herself; moreover, Johnson was by no means popular with the young men of the station.

"I wish you would come with me, Miss Holt," he pleaded; "even if we did not amuse each other, we could see how the others managed it, and that would be something."

She gave a quick glance round. St. Quentin was no longer in her vicinity, and with a faint smile, she assented to the boy's proposition, moving away with lingering steps as though half hoping, or at least expecting, that someone would follow.

But no one did. St. Quentin at that moment was occupied in lighting a cigarette and did not look that way, being indeed half inclined to give up all hope of speaking to her that night.

It is strange how trifles light as air and insignificant in themselves may influence all our lives for good or ill.

A mere coming-in, a going-out, a glance, a word at the right moment or the wrong, an act simple in itself, yet destined to be repented through many weary watches of the night; anyone of these things, utterly meaningless perhaps, and without definite intention, may mar the fairest prospects, ruin the brightest hopes, or on the other hand, lead to a happiness of which hitherto we scarcely dared to dream.

St. Quentin never knew whether it were pique or wounded pride, or simply the promptings of an adverse fate, that caused him to glance at Mrs. Hare, and meeting her gaze, at once provoking and inviting, stroll over to her side. A moment later, he found himself walking with her under the trees, the moon streaming down on her upturned face and the diamond rings upon her fingers as with one hand she secured a lace kerchief under her chin.

"There are more dangerous things than sunstroke, they tell me. Have you never heard of moon-blindness, or moon-madness, which is it?" she asked, in her lowest, most thrilling tones, bringing her eyes to bear with deadliest effect upon his face.

"I can believe in both, here, with you," he whispered back, and the conversation having once taken this turn, it required someone with a stronger head or harder heart than St. Quentin possessed to lead it back into safer channels. The moon was so soft and bright, and its rays so exquisitely becoming to the woman who moved gracefully at his side, that it was no wonder he lost his head for the nonce, and all ideas of the flight of time until nearly an hour later, a sudden turn of the path they were treading brought them face to face with Judith and her companion.

He—with all the sentiment which formed so large a proportion of his character, aroused by the circumstances and the temptation to which they had exposed him—was leaning down to listen to words purposely spoken beneath her breath; while she—the consummate flirt and intriguer as she was—pretended the greatest confusion when she recognised her rival.

Judith made no sign that she was hurt or surprised. Her clear blue eyes had taken in the situation at a glance, every detail of the scene, even the fact that round her shoulders Mrs. Hare was wearing a scarf fac-simile of the one that St. Quentin had given to her, and which she too, was wearing then for the first time. Mrs. Hare's keen sight had also detected this at once.

"Is it not a lovely night, and am I not good to give you all a chance of enjoying it; and what a pretty scarf, Miss Holt, just like mine? I wonder if it was given by the same person?"

"It is not a gift. It was only lent, and shall be returned," with a defiant glance towards her recreant lover.

Mrs. Hare smiled, and shrugged her shoulders with a pretty, deprecating gesture.

"I can see I have touched on a sore subject. Let us go on before I make more mistakes," she said, playfully, and obediently St. Quentin went where she led.

Judith turned to her companion, a pathos in her eyes of which she was not conscious.

"Would you mind fetching my coat? It is chillier than I thought!" she said; and, wondering what it was that had moved her so, the boy went on her errand, leaving her leisure to think and recover her composure.

Though she had never allowed herself to love him, there had been a tenderness in her relations with St. Quentin she could not deny nor explain away. No man had ever been so near touching her heart, none had been so continually in her thoughts.

He had awakened in her impulses she had never guessed could ever come into her mind—feelings that she had thought would be impossible to her, though common to all other women.

He had taught her that she too was capable of love, proved to her the weakness she had been too prone to deny. But even now, as all the new and tender shoots were springing up, an icy wind had shrivelled them in one keen, cruel blast, and she doubted if they could ever come to blossom.

Never had she met any man so gentle and winning in manner, so manly-looking, yet graceful in his movements as a woman; never was there such a pleasant voice, so sweet and so persuasive! such a handsome face, such speaking eyes, and yet never, never, surely, in all the wide, wide world was there ever so weak a nature, so false a tongue!

With fingers tightly clasped, and strained gaze into the darkness beyond, she stood and waited, thinking bitter thoughts, though to someone who drew nearer, unnoticed in the heavy shadows that fell upon the path along which he came, her face seemed marvellously calm. Perhaps she was not so angry as he had feared.

"Judith!" he whispered, eagerly, and with a start she turned.

"Is it you, Captain St. Quentin?" she asked, quietly.

"Yes; it is I. It is not so wonderful that I should come where my thoughts have been all night! Why were you so cold just now at dinner? You would not speak, nor even look my way!"

Using a strategy that often proves successful, he had attempted to carry the war into the enemy's country, but Judith took no notice of his ruse, and let the accusation go by unheeded, only a scornful smile on her curved lips showing she had heard it.

"You are vexed with me! Angry because I was walking with Mrs. Hare! If you only knew how I longed to be with you!"

"You concealed the longing very well!" she remarked, and laughed.

"Surely you are not jealous of that woman?"

"Jealous!"

"Then you think I have broken my promise?"

"I asked you for no promise! That you have chosen to ignore a self-imposed vow, concerns you only, and not me!"

"Yet, if you cared——"

"I do not care! What you do is, and must always be, indifferent to me!"

He looked at her—a look that an hour before would have made her tremble and colour like a rose, but now left her utterly irresponsive. The sight of his faithlessness as she had seen it, beyond question or possibility of self-defence, had cured her in a moment of what from the first she had felt to be a weakness; all the faint doubt she had been conscious of before culminating in a bitter unbelief that nothing he could plead would shake.

Yet so near had she been to loving him, that the putting him out of her heart caused her an acute pang, and for a long, long time she would feel an aching void.

Though her idol had proved to have had feet of clay, he had nevertheless been her idol for a while, and not just yet dared she gaze on the pedestal on which she had set him—empty now, yet occupied for many a day to come with memories of the past, and thoughts of what might have been. She looked beyond him, not at him, being at the same time too proud to sink her eyes.

St. Quentin guessed something of what was in her mind, knew that she despised him utterly for his vacillation, yet, man-like, the very opposition he foresaw increased his interest in the pursuit, his voice being pregnant with deepest passion, as he went on, earnestly—

"Do not judge me unheard. Can any woman judge a man fairly, not understanding his temptations, and expecting him to be pure and single-minded as she herself. Whatever my faults, I love you! I love you with all my soul—no other shall ever be my wife. Will you reject me?"

With a movement of her body, a turn of her head, she answered him—in words coming readily to her lips. Her heart had softened towards him as he spoke, but she could never love him now, however speciously he argued, nor however warm his prayers. All that was over for ever. If he would only realise that it was so, and spare her further pain.

"I thought you loved me," he burst out, reproachfully.

"It is so easy to be deceived—it is so easy to deceive oneself," she answered, gently.

"Do you mean to say you never cared—ever?"

She shook her head.

"I might have done had everything happened differently," she admitted, the next instant.

"And do you mean that for the sake of that woman—a woman without either heart or conscience, who is well known as an unscrupulous flirt?"

"You said she was your friend," she reminded him, in cold distaste.

He had the grace to look ashamed as he answered, quickly—

"I cannot pick and choose my words when so much is at stake. Only forgive me the past, and in the future you shall have no cause for anger or contempt."

"I forgive you of course."

"But I want more than forgiveness. Oh, Judith! I want your love! Be merciful! give me some hope!"

His handsome face was bent to the level of her own; his moustaches almost touching her hair, while one arm stole softly round her waist.

"I love you! I love you!" he repeated, passionately, in her ear.

Quietly, she released herself, and faced him from a distance. A mist rose before her eyes, and, indistinctly, she saw her cousin Avon standing in the place of the man she had

judged, and found so wanting. The longer she gazed the more misleading was the vision until it became so lifelike, she felt impelled to stretch out her hands to him, to speak his name though with no definite intention, no thought of rescinding her decision of six months ago.

It was only because he was so true, while this other was so false, so strong; while he who stood before her now, was unstable as water, and incapable of pure and earnest passion. It was the idea that Avon's great love for her had enabled him to bridge the distance between them, and appear before her, waking as latterly he had often done in dreams, gave her new strength to conclude a trying scene, and lent a steadfastness to her reply that there was no gainsaying.—

"All this only distresses us both, and can do no good. I can never care for you. I will never be your wife."

As her clear, decided tones fell on the quiet evening air, footsteps approached them quickly, and the next moment young Malleverer was holding a coat for her to put on.

"Such a hunt as I had for it! All the coachmen were asleep, or *hubble-bubbling*. They don't deserve to be out on a night like this," he observed, cheerily.

"I don't suppose it has ever entered their heads that it could be an occasion for enjoyment," was the light response.

St. Quentin stood apart watching her, drinking in every detail of her beauty, driven almost to madness by the thought that but for his own folly she might have been his, and was now farther removed from his reach than any other.

She looked very lovely in the moonlight as it streamed down through a break in the trees and bathed her in its pale glory, yet never had she seemed so unapproachable.

Her beautiful blue eyes gleamed cold like steel, her lips were compressed in proudest scorn, the very carriage of her head expressed disdain unspeakable as she turned to move away with young Malleverer.

Now when she was lost to him she seemed more beautiful than ever in his eyes, and with a last desperate effort to recover lost ground, St. Quentin sprang to her side.

"I did not explain. Perhaps you did not understand. Let me see you again to-morrow, and I will tell you all."

From a distance floated the words of a song, with which Mrs. Hare was—in spite of her protestations—entertaining her guests. The words had an accent of sadness that impressed them both, and neither in after years forgot the air, nor the circumstances under which they heard it once.

"You do not love me, no,
Bid me good-bye and go;
Good-bye, good-bye, 'tis better so,
Bid me good-bye and go."

It was the end of a verse; and Judith had only hesitated a moment before she answered quietly, no trace of pain, nor even regret in her tones,—

"There is nothing you can have to say, nothing that I wish to hear," then passed away from his presence and out of his life for ever.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HER FATE SEALED.

"MISS SAHID, it is the English mail come in."

Judith had been standing at the window, watching aimlessly the movements of Mr. Sherston and his guest as they walked outside and talked together, but had never noticed that a scarlet coated *chuprassie* joined them, and gave something into the Commissioner's hand. Now she was roused from her apathy by the Madrassee bearer's voice behind her; the next moment she was speeding over the grass and had reached them before the two gentlemen knew she had left the house. In

the Commissioner's grasp was a letter with the English postmarks and stamps, and she had seen it was addressed to herself, when Mr. Johnson, with a muttered exclamation, put his hand hastily upon it.

"It is for me!" she cried, a sharp ring of defiance in her voice.

"I beg your pardon," Mr. Johnson began, but the Commissioner put him peremptorily to one side.

"Yes, there is a letter for you, Miss Holt," he admitted and gave it to her at once; the other scowling with baffled rage.

Clasping her prize tightly to her breast, and panting a little from suppressed excitement, Judith withdrew some paces to where a garden seat was fixed under the shadow of a peepal tree. There she sat down, and after a slight pause, during which she recovered her composure, opened the letter.

Johnson pulled the Commissioner's sleeve in angriest impatience.

"You were mad to give it her. I believe you will repeat it to the last day of your life!" he said venomously.

"Why, what is it you fear?"

He put away his glasses and looked straight into the man's face as he spoke, and Johnson's eyes fell beneath his gaze; he was compelled to equivocate.

"Nothing, nothing definite I mean; but the girl is dangerous beyond a doubt, and the fewer weapons she holds the better—for us both."

Then Mr. Sherston knew that the story Judith had told him was a true one, that the unscrupulous adventurer who had wrecked his life had also destroyed her prospects. For a moment he felt indignant, inclined to avenge her wrongs and his own at the same time, but a strain of cowardice, ever inherent in his nature, stifled the wholesome impulse, and he resolved to use the knowledge he had gained in self-defence.

"I cannot think what damage an English letter could do you, unless, of course, there were passages in your life there as discreditable."

"Are you not unwise to use such a word in connection with an affair by which you certainly gained more than I?" interrupted Johnson, with an evil look in his near set eyes.

Mr. Sherston quailed before it, and said something unintelligible about having been "led away" and "a cat's paw always," observations which Mr. Johnson received with sinister amusement.

"Whoever was most to blame, remember this," he declared, impressively, "that what affects me will also affect you. I will not fall alone!" Then turned and went into the house.

In the meantime, with throbbing pulses, Judith read her letter, which was from Mr. Holt, and in answer to the one she had written expressing her suspicion that the Mr. Collett, whose roguery had ruined them, was under the same roof with her, though bearing another name.

(To be continued.)

CLIFF DWELLINGS.—Not until a recent date would the Moors permit any examination of the cliff dwellings which have long been known to exist some days' journey south-west of the city of Morocco. This strange city of the cave dwellers is almost exactly like some of those in New Mexico and other territories which archaeologists have explored. The dwellings were dug out of the solid rock, and many of them are over two hundred feet above the bottom of the valley. The face of the cliff is places perpendicular, and it is believed that the troglodytes could have reached their dwellings only with the aid of rope ladders. Some of the dwellings contained three rooms, the largest of which is about seventeen by seven feet, and the walls of the larger rooms are generally pierced by windows. Nothing is known as to who these cave-dwellers were.

LITTLE SUNBEAMS.

—o—

LITTLE sunbeams, never weary,
Though at early morn you rise,
Waking up the tender blossoms
With your merry laughing eyes.
Little sunbeams, how I love you
As you steal among the trees,
Kissing every tiny leaflet
Rocking in the summer breeze.

Now within some lonely dwelling
Comes your warm and genial ray,
And you watch the dimpled fingers
Of a child with toys at play.
Now you linger for a moment
On a pale and careworn cheek,
And though silent, yet how kindly
To the weary soul you speak.

Little sunbeams, how I love you,
What a lesson you impart,
For your loving smile has taught me
How to soothe an aching heart.
Little sunbeams, never weary,
Though from morn till eve you shine,
Still to follow your example
May the cheerful task be mine.

F. C.

GERDA'S SACRIFICE.

—o:—

CHAPTER VII.

REGINALD TRAVERS stood alone, his uncle's last will and testament in his hand. Rex was not a mercenary man. A year ago he might have mourned a little over his change of fortune, but he would have borne the blow bravely. Now all was changed; he had a lovely idolized wife who had confessed with her own lips she feared nothing in the world so much as poverty.

He took up the paper and read it slowly, as a man who expects to find his doom there. Rosamond's lovely face rose up before him reproachfully as the truth burst upon him.

"I, Guy Travers, fourteenth Earl of Castleton, in my sound mind, revoking all other wills, do hereby declare this my last will and testament. I give all of which I shall die possessed to my only child, the Lady Gerda Travers, on condition that she marry her cousin, the Honourable Reginald Travers; and if my daughter refuse this alliance, then all that portion of my property which I have the power to will away I bequeath to my nephew, the said Reginald Travers; and if he, the said Reginald, refuse my daughter's hand, then he shall inherit none of my property, save that my lawyers shall have power to pay his debts, and present him with the sum of one thousand pounds. And I appoint my trusted friend, Thomas Ashwin, guardian and trustee to the Lady Gerda; and all the servants now in my employ I recommend my only child, that they may serve her faithfully as they have served me."

That was all. Well, one thing Reginald was saved—all doubt, all suspense. Having that morning made Rosamond his wife he was powerless, had he wished it ever so, to comply with the conditions of his uncle's will. All that he could receive from the family estate were a free payment of his debts and a paltry thousand pounds.

He had never in his life contemplated such a possibility. The liberal allowance received from Lord Castleton had grown to seem only his right. With that and his pay he lived luxuriously, as became a nobleman's heir. Even as a bachelor he had managed to spend his income very easily. How on earth was he to live on his pay and support a beautiful wife?

He never attempted to go to bed; it would

have been a mockery. How could he attempt to sleep when his brain was racked by one awful question—how was he to break this news to Rosamond? Could he, by any human possibility, keep it from her.

One thing, he inherited the title. Though the property and estates could devolve on a female, by some strange chance the peerage could not. Reginald was the Earl of Castleton, but the wealth on which he must maintain his honours was considerably less than many a confidential clerk.

He went down to breakfast next morning looking years older; his face looked positively haggard in the winter sunshine.

Giles alone was in attendance. The faithful old servant had known the Castleton family so long that their joys and sorrows were his. He looked at the young lord questioningly.

"It is quite true, Giles. That girl we saw yesterday is my uncle's daughter. She takes all that was his except the title. That, by a mockery, is mine."

"But the property?" said the old man, slowly. "I beg pardon, my lord, but the master was so rich, and he never spent but a trifle on himself. Besides what *must* go to the estates there'd be enough to make you a wealthy nobleman."

Rex sighed.

"It goes to Lady Gerda. It might have been mine on one condition—that I married her, and—and nothing would induce me to make her my wife—a girl who has lived all her life in obscurity, who knows nothing of our rank."

The breakfast-room was only divided by heavy velvet curtains from a small apartment furnished as a study; the curtains were closely drawn. It never entered into Reginald's head to think there might be someone behind them.

"She's so young, my lord," said the old servant, half apologetically, "and she's a Travers."

"I could never marry an ill-mannered, unattractive school-girl; besides, it's too late. I have a wife already, beautiful as a poet's dream, lovely as a painter's ideal. For her sake I could almost hate this orphan, who comes to rob my Rosamond of all that should be hers."

He rose and went upstairs. Giles removed the breakfast things, and then noticing the door of the grand entrance stood open he shut it with a bang, wondering a little whose carelessness he should blame for leaving it thus.

Alas! Could he have looked behind the heavy velvet curtains of the breakfast-room he would have seen a sight fit to move the sternest heart.

Stretched in a tumbled heap upon the floor, heavy sobs shaking her slender frame, was the girl whom fate had made the cause of Reginald's troubles—the Lady Gerda Travers!

She knelt there in her misery. The turf was fresh on her mother's grave; her father had been taken from her. She had but one relation in the world—the man who had spoken of her so brutally.

She had been told he would be her protector and friend, that to him she might go for guidance and affection. He was the only living creature with whom she might claim kindred, and lo! he hated her.

"If only I could die!" moaned the poor girl in her misery. "If only I could give up the life that stands between him and happiness. He is so noble-looking, so handsome and stately. Oh! why cannot he be happy with his lovely wife?"

The girl who had never had a lover, whose heart and fancy Reginald's noble presence had enchain'd, thought with bitter regret upon his altered prospects, his blighted future. Some women, thank Heaven, are almost selfless. Kneeling there, Gerda recked nothing of her own lonely life. Her one desire, her sole aspiration, was to leave Rex in possession of her wealth.

She pictured his wife as fair, and sweet, and

lovable. She dwelt on their mutual affection, on their perfect sympathy, until the pain at her own heart felt heavier than she could bear; and then, with one heavy sigh, she rose, walked slowly out of the study through the grand entrance hall, out into the snow-wrapt grounds.

She stood for one moment motionless, and gazed upon the home of her ancestors, where her father had lived and died. She stood and looked as one whose heart was broken. She was the only daughter of that house, and yet it could never be home to her.

She walked back, weak and faint as she was from her recent illness, to the "Travers' Arms," and sank down on a seat in the little sitting room. She could not think she could not plan out her future, she just sat there silently.

Thomas Ashton coming in found her thus. He, at least, was faithful to her interests. Had she been reigning at the Castle, with all the pomp and rank which were her birth-right, he could not have been more true and loyal.

"The will is found," he said, simply. "Lady Gerda, in a short time you will be your father's acknowledged heiress, mistress of the Castle; but there are certain forms to be gone through which would, I fear, make this place an unpleasant residence for you at present. Will you, therefore, let me take you to London, and form a temporary home for you there?"

She turned to him impulsively.

"I wish I were dead. I have brought nothing but trouble to this place."

"Hush! You must not talk like that! I grant you this has been a painful homecoming, but things will look brighter soon, Lady Gerda."

"Never!"

"You are so young," he urged, gently. "You will rally from this blow; other love will replace that you have lost, and—"

"I never meant to love anyone again. Love brings only misery. Look at the new Lord Castleton!"

"His love should not bring him misery. He was married yesterday to a beautiful girl."

"I know," said Gerda; "and I have wrecked both their lives. They might be so happy but for me."

"If she married your cousin for love no poverty can make the young Countess miserable. If she married him for position and wealth she is rightly punished!"

"Have you ever seen her?"

"Never. The marriage amazed me. I had hoped the Earl was free, and that your father's wishes might be realised."

Gerda blushed crimson.

"I shall never marry anyone!"

"Why not?"

"I am a plain, unattractive girl," thinking of Reginald's words; "no one would love me for myself, and I think it would break my heart to be married for my money."

"You will take a more cheerful view of life some day. Should you like to see your cousin again before you leave Yorkshire?"

"Not for worlds!"

"Then I think we may as well go up by the afternoon express. I will have a carriage there at four o'clock. Can you be ready?"

"I am ready now."

"There is one spot I think you would like to see—the church where your ancestors worshipped, in whose graveyard most of them are interred. Castleton Church is inseparably connected with your family. Tradition goes that there never was a son of Castleton who had not been christened at the old stone font."

A little more conversation, and he left her. Gerda rang the bell, and asked the landlady to direct her to the church. The woman offered to attend her there, but Gerda refused.

"I would rather go alone."

The landlady noticed the girl wore her heavy black cloak, and that she moved with a

tired, languid step. She knew by this time her guest's identity, and said respectfully,—

"Indeed, indeed, my lady, you're not fit to walk; you look so white and weary. Do rest yourself on the sofa, and go to see the church some other time?"

Gerda shook her head.

"I must go now," she said. Then with a wistful smile she put out her thin white hand, "Good-bye; you have been very kind to me. Tell Mr. Ashwin I am very glad he brought me here instead of taking me to the Castle."

It struck the woman as a trifle odd that the lady should take leave of her now, since it wanted good five hours to the time of her departure. It seemed strange, too, that she should send a message to her guardian, when she would certainly meet him at luncheon; but Mrs. Macquean supposed "the quality" had queer ways, and were not like other people; and so she busied herself about her household duties, and tried hard to put that fair, delicate creature, whose sadness was so evident, out of her thoughts.

Mr. Ashwin, meanwhile, was at the Castle in solemn consultation with the Earl. Alas! no consultation could avail much. The free payment of his debts and a thousand pounds in cash was all Rex could ever benefit from his uncle's wealth.

"It is a most eccentric will!" said the young noble, bitterly. "Why did he allow me an ample income all these years if he meant to leave me as a pauper?"

"He always believed you were his heir; for years he was unconscious of his child's existence."

"A pretty child!—an ignorant, under-bred girl!"

"Hush!" corrected the other; "I can make allowances for your disappointment, but you must not slander my ward. The Lady Gerda is in great trouble now, and pale from recent illness, I grant you she seems sad and uninteresting, but there is nothing common or ill-bred about her, she is worthy in every way for her position."

"I suppose she will live here?"

"I think of sending her abroad for a few months, as soon as the first edge of her grief has worn off. She must return and be presented to the Queen at the first Drawing-room. The heiress of fifty thousand a year and untold savings is sure to marry in her first season."

"I suppose so."

"I am taking her to London this afternoon. Lord Castleton, I know she has injured you, but she, poor child, is quite innocent of offence. You are her only kinsman—the last representative of her family. Could you not forgive her your disappoint, sufficiently just to call and wish her god-speed before she leaves?"

There was a struggle in Reginald's heart. To his life's end he rejoiced that the right triumphed.

"I will call with pleasure. You had better lunch with me, Mr. Ashwin, and I will walk with you to the 'Travers' Arms' afterwards. As you say, Lady Gerda and I are cousins, and for her father's sake I am willing to acknowledge the relationship."

Mr. Ashwin yielded, and lunched with the Earl. They talked of many things, only towards the conclusion of the repast did they touch on the subject of the young nobleman's plans.

"Shall you continue in the army, Lord Castleton?"

"I fancy not. To tell the truth it would be too expensive. I must sell out, and try to get a diplomatic appointment."

"You would not think of a country life?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Until the Lady Gerda marries or comes of age some establishment must be formed for her. A liberal income could be allowed for it if you and the Countess of Castleton were disposed to make your home here, as personal guardian to your young kinswoman."

It was a generous offer, since it provided for present emergencies. Until Rex sold his com-

mission, and obtained the diplomatic appointment he spoke of, his expenses must be fearfully heavy; this provided him with a luxurious home for at least some months. Rosamond might still have any delight she coveted. It would give her husband time to consider their position, and deliberate on the future.

"I am very much obliged to you, but—"

"Lady Castleton would be absolute mistress here. My ward is one of the gentlest most yielding natures; to all intents and purposes the Castle would be your home, and the Lady Gerda your visitor."

"I like the idea of it, but it seems only deferring the cruel day. We must leave the Castle eventually."

"Ay! But you may as well stay here until you leave it for a good diplomatic post abroad?"

"I agree with you. I must consult my wife. Anyway, I thank you. I have not deserved such consideration at your hands. I know I must seem to you to have played a despicable, mercenary part here; but you can't understand the dreams I had formed. My wife is the loveliest woman in London. She is worthy the coronet of a duchess, and the thought of having brought her to poverty is enough to drive me wild."

"I am sure Lady Castleton will exonerate you from any blame; the love of women is often strong in adversity, my lord. I doubt not this misfortune will draw the Countess and yourself even closer to each other, since you will depend upon her love."

Poor Rex was silent; he would have given much to be as confident as his companion. He loved Rosamond as his own soul; he freely worshipped her, and yet he could not hide from himself the did not care for him as he did for her. How much or how little love had entered into her marriage he could not tell; only, alas! he knew the ownership of Castleton and its thousands had entered a great deal.

To his thinking it would be best to accept Mr. Ashwin's proposal, and at once take up their abode at the Castle, with Lady Gerda as their inmate, but he had no idea how Rosamond might view such a plan. He had never seen his wife with other women; he had heard her inveigle bitterly against her own sex. It might be she would utterly refuse to receive her husband's cousin into her house.

"I shall return to London the end of the week," he said, presently; "there is nothing to remain here for, and I am anxious to rejoin my wife."

"I trust you have good accounts of her?"

"Excellent! It is rather hard on a man to be torn away from his wife on her wedding day."

"It is, indeed! Will you give me your address, and allow me the pleasure of calling upon Lady Castleton? It might be a consolation to her to hear from me that you are in the enjoyment of good health."

Rex gave the address gladly.

"Of course you won't tell her anything about this affair?"

"Your uncle's death?"

"No, his daughter. It will be a great blow, I fear, and I had rather break it to her myself."

"Three o'clock," as the hour sounded. "I suppose it is time we were setting out?"

They walked arm in arm to the village inn, and went straight upstairs to the private parlour, but to their surprise the room was empty; the table was laid for luncheon, but there was no sign of Lady Gerda.

Thomas Ashwin rang the bell.

"I trust Lady Gerda did not wait lunch for me," he said to the landlady, "I fear she will not have time now for any but the most hurried refreshment."

The woman looked at him bewildered.

"I made sure, sir, her ladyship was with you? I got a little fidgety when one o'clock came and brought neither of you: then I thought maybe you'd met her, sir, and taken her to the Castle."

Even then, no fear of the truth dawned upon either of the woman's listeners.

"Then you knew her ladyship had gone out?"

"Oh! yes, sir. She had told me she was going to see the church, but she looked so white and tired I begged of her to wait."

"And she would not?"

"She just shook her head sir, in that pretty way she had, and went on. Then she came back and thanked me, and shook hands with me, and asked me to tell you she was glad you had brought her here instead of taking her to the Castle. I remember now I thought it a little odd she should send a message to you when she would see you herself so soon."

Rex glanced at his watch.

"Four o'clock. I think you will have to postpone your journey, Mr. Ashwin."

"But where can she be?"

The Earl shook his head.

"Perhaps she felt tired and went straight to her own room on coming back."

Mrs. Macquean denied this.

"She couldn't, sir—my lord, I mean. I must have seen her. You have to go through my parlour to get upstairs."

"It would be better to look," persisted the Earl.

Mrs. Macquean looked, under protest, however. She returned triumphant, Lady Gerda was not in her room, had not been there since the early morning.

"I don't like this!" said Reginald. "Do you think she can have run away?"

"Where to, poor child? Where could she go without money or friends?"

"You are sure she went to the church, Mrs. Macquean?"

"Quite, sir; I watched her start myself."

Thomas Ashwin turned away from the inn, Rex followed him.

Neither of the men spoke as they walked down the narrow village street. They turned up a lane, opened a little gate, and entered the churchyard. It was beautifully kept. The rector was a rich man, and childless. It was his hobby that the abode of the dead should resemble a beautiful garden. Even in the depth of winter it was a lovely sight. The turf was smooth as velvet, the snow had been swept away, and only a few drops of water glistened here and there in the December sunshine.

The many-coloured chrysanthemums lifted their heads, the ivy clambered up the walls, sweet violets bloomed; there was nothing but the white headstones to recall the purpose of the place. A simple holly hedge divided it from the lane and on the other side of the church. Even that was unheeded, for the ground sloped down to the river's bank.

It was here that stood the enclosure sacred to the Castletons, where, with the rolling waters passing to and fro, and playing, as it were, their requiem, slept the dead and gone members of the family here, remote from strife and care, slept, awaiting the resurrection of the blest.

Thomas Ashwin glanced round.

"I see no trace of her." The woman must have been mistaken in thinking she came here."

"Stay!" and the Earl's voice sank to an awestruck whisper. "Look there!"

The other man obeyed, and his face grew graver than even the news of the railway accident had been able to make it. There, at a little distance from them, lay the thick black cloak in which the Lady Gerda had travelled from Yorkshire, close to the water's edge.

The Earl shuddered.

"Can she have fallen in?"

But though he used the word "fallen" it did not express his real fear. The dread that possessed him was that the girl who had no one to love and cherish her on earth, who, heiress though she was, had no loving friends, and knew no affectionate kindred, had sought a home for herself in those cold, cruel waters!

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Reginald's conscience pricked him. From the moment he heard of Gerda's existence he had disliked her. He had resented the fact that all he coveted for his wife must be hers, and now it filled him with an awful remorse to think that he, her only kinsman, had spurned the orphan girl, that he who owed so much to his uncle, had yet not bestowed a word of kindness on the dead man's child.

Stooping down, he pushed away the rushes which grew thickly on the bank, and showed to Mr. Ashwin on the marshy soil—which no frost could dry up because of the ever-simmering water—the impress of a little foot.

"It is her! Oh! Ashwin, speak to me! Tell me what has happened?"

"I can't!" said the other man, hoarsely. "Lord Castleton, you don't know what the child was: how sweet and true, and pure I found her, I restored her to her father! And, oh! my lord, I would give years from my own life that this should not have happened!"

"It can't be!" said the Earl, obstinately. "It is an accident; the footprint means nothing. We shall find her safe at the inn with Mrs. Macquarie."

In perfect silence his companion pointed to the river. There, floating at some distance from them, so near they could have reached it with the help of a stout stick, was the little blue hat in which Lady Gerda had left the "Travers arms."

Lord Castleton's first impulse was to throw off his coat and plunge into the river, but Mr. Ashwin held him back.

"It would be madness! The water is at its deepest hereabouts, and the current very strong. Think of your wife!"

Lord Castleton stood motionless, watching the rippling water. There was no more room for doubt, both as they were to believe it. The two men both knew that the Lady Gerda had taken her fate into her own hands, and rushed, sin-stained, into the presence of her Maker.

"It was not her fault," said Ashwin, slowly. "She was so young and helpless; father and mother taken so soon after each other. Alone in the world and friendless, who can blame her?"

"The blame is on my head," said the Earl, in a strange, subdued voice. "I coveted her inheritance; I almost brought myself to wish she had never been born. Mr. Ashwin, in Heaven's sight, I am that poor girl's murderer!"

They both felt it was useless, but they raised the alarm. A young lady had fallen into the mere whilst walking in the churchyard. A crowd gathered round the spot, the fishermen came with drags, some of the Castle servants aided them, all that it was possible to do was done.

"It is quite useless," said the Rector, a tall, silver-haired, old man, with Heaven's peace upon his brow. "Lord Castleton, the current is so strong here that no one could live five minutes exposed to its fury. Fear you will not even recover the body!"

"Have many people been lost here?" asked Ashwin, respectfully.

The Rector shook his head.

"The dangers of the spot are too well known. I have been here forty years, and this is only the second accident in the mere. You say the victim is a young lady; surely she is a stranger?"

"Yes, and yet she was one whose name must ring in everyone's ears!" said Lord Castleton, solemnly; "my cousin, the Lady Gerda, owner of Castleton!"

The old man looked astonished.

"Poor child! She had come to look at the spot which contains so many of her race."

"No doubt."

"After all," said Mr. Carlyle, slowly, "her life would have been a sad one; motherless and an heiress, she would have been exposed to many temptations. Perhaps this accident came in Heaven's mercy to remove her from the evil to come."

Neither of the men could bring themselves

to contradict him and reveal the truth—that it was no accident which had cut off Gerda Travers in the bloom of her girlhood; neither of them would have shared with anyone else the awful certainty they felt that she had committed suicide.

They went back to the inn presently, Ashwin with the cloak over his arm.

"I wonder you can bear to touch it," said the Earl, simply. "I could not!"

"I must do more. I must examine it, Lord Castleton. If there be any clue to your cousin's fate it will be here; no stranger's eye must find that clue!"

He was right. Among the folds of the heavy mantle was a tiny pencilled note addressed to himself. It was written in unsteady, trembling characters, as though with shaking fingers, and in more than one place it was blotted with tears.

"You who united my father and mother, who have been all kindness to their orphan child, will not judge me harshly, but will still think of her pilying even when you know she has taken her fate into her own hands, and that on earth you will see her face no more.

"To you she leaves her undying gratitude, and from her heart she wishes all happiness to the man who will reign in her father's home, whose beautiful wife bears her mother's title. Think kindly of her who has known much suffering and little joy." "GERDA."

Lord Castleton read it slowly over Mr. Ashwin's shoulder; his eyes were not dry when he had finished.

"What shall you do?"

"There is nothing to be done. There must be a notice of accidental death sent to the papers, and Lady Gerda's name must be inserted in the next peerage—that is all."

"And I—?"

"You are what you always hoped to be, master of Castleton. Your position is now actually what you believed it to be when you tore yourself away from your bride to come to Yorkshire!"

"You speak scornfully."

"I do not mean to be; this matter has unsevered me terribly, Lord Castleton."

"And me!"

"Only you have your reward. Gerda's death—I would rather call it Gerda's sacrifice—enables you to fulfil every promise of luxury ever made to your wife. Lady Castleton need never know the tumult of anxiety you have undergone."

"Do you believe in presentiments, Ashwin?"

"No."

"Nor I in general. I am not in the least a superstitious man, but I am haunted just now by an awful foreboding of ill."

"What is it?"

Reginald looked far away into space as he answered.—

"That as I grudged Gerda her inheritance, that as I, in a measure, coveted its possession, so it will bring me evil instead of good, and, through Castleton and its thousands, sore trouble fall on me."

"Nonsense!"

"I wish I could believe it."

"You must shake it off."

"I can't."

"Hasten your return to London. In your bride's society such gloomy forebodings must cease."

Rex was nothing loth to obey this suggestion. He could do no good by remaining. Gerda's sacrifice was made, he could not help reaping the benefit of it. He might as well return to London, and try and forget the miserable episode of his stay in Yorkshire.

So he gave orders for a handsome tablet to be placed in Castleton Church to the memory of Lady Gerda. He gave instructions for the Castle to be prepared for its mistress, and then he went up to London, and arrived at the Langham Hotel between six and seven on Friday evening, just four days after he had left it.

Only four days, and yet they had changed the whole current of his life! Only four days, and yet they had entailed on him a burden of remorse he must carry with him as long as he lived.

Mrs. Travers was at home. Rex left his new name and dignity with the attendants and went upstairs. Rosamond was lying on the sofa; the bright firelight and the brighter gas made the room one flood of cheerful warmth. Lady Castleton, to call her by her new title, looked her liveliest. She was dressed in a soft, black grenadine mourning, hastily assumed for her husband's uncle. Her white throat and rounded arms gleamed like polished ivory; her splendid eyes were closed, their dark lashes falling like a fringe on her pure, white skin, while her soft, golden hair was coiled low on her neck and fell in short, fluffycurls on her forehead. Reginald went up to her and looked at her with passionate love. For a moment he forgot Gerda's sacrifice, and his burden of remorse. He thought of nothing but his wife Rosamond.

She stirred uneasily.

He stooped down and kissed her lips. The caress aroused her, she opened her eyes and smiled her welcome.

"Rex! You have really come. How could you stay so long?"

Never had she greeted him so warmly, never had he seen such unmistakable gladness shining in her eyes. A great content came to the Earl, a doubt that had haunted him seemed set at rest. Now, at this moment he could have sworn that Rosamond loved him.

"I did not stay willingly, my darling. I have counted the days and hours until I could return to you. Ah! Rosamond, I wonder if you have any idea how much I love you?"

The Countess smiled.

"I think so. I have missed you terribly, Rex. It seemed such an ill-omened commencement of our married life."

"I don't believe in omens, Rose."

"And you were in time?"

He shook his head.

"I arrived to find my uncle dead. Rosamond, from the moment of our marriage you were Countess of Castleton."

She looked as if she liked the title.

"Was ever Countess married in such a propitious fashion?" she asked, lightly. "Was ever Countess deserted on her wedding-day?"

"Not deserted, Rose."

"You could not help it, Rex," putting one white hand upon his arm, and smiling up into his face, "but it was very hard on me. You owe me a great many favours to make amends."

"What shall they be, child?"

Lady Castleton paused to reflect.

"Our wedding can't come over again," she said, quietly. "We can't have the bridesmaids and guests and other things we missed; but, though a little after date, there is nothing to prevent our having a honeymoon."

"Nothing in the world. In two or three weeks' time we will start on our travels, Rose, and roam wherever your fancy bids us."

"Not in two or three weeks' time," said the bride, with pretty impetuosity, "but now."

"This very minute?" laughing. "It would be very late."

"Not at all," said his wife. "We could catch the mail train, and cross to Flushing tonight."

She spoke with feverish earnestness; anyone who did not know differently might have fancied her very life, or the life of one dear, to her depended on this sudden journey.

Lord Castleton laughed.

"Make a moonlight flitting? Nonsense, Rosamond. People would say we were eloping."

"They wouldn't."

"Besides, there is no haste. I want my wife to myself for a few days before I set out on any more travels. I have a hundred-and-one things to see to; I can't leave London under a fortnight."



"STAY!" AND THE EARL'S VOICE HANK TO AN AWESTRUCK WHISPER. "LOOK THERE!"

Say you *won't*," irritably."

It was the strangest fancy ever known, but it had entirely taken possession of the Countess. Her one idea seemed to be flight, to escape from her comfortable quarters at the "Langham." In vain Rex asked if she had not been properly waited upon; in vain he begged her to explain her distaste to the hotel. She would say nothing, explain nothing; her one cry was, she wished to go; and when Rex pointed out to her that it was impossible, she got up, and, without a word of farewell, swept from the room.

Her husband sat down by the fire; it had burnt low during the discussion. Reginald's bright visions of home life had sunk low too. He loved Rosamond dearly, but there were duties he must attend to before he started.

Enter the chamber-maid, who started on seeing Lord Castleton.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," (the story of his honours had travelled quickly), "I thought her ladyship was here. I wished to ask at what hour she would leave?"

Lord Castleton started.

"Leave!" he exclaimed.

"My lady talked of the boat train from Victoria station," explained the girl.

"That is all altered now I have returned," said Rex, quickly. "We shall probably be here several days. Lady Castleton has gone to her room with a headache. Perhaps you will ask if you can be of any use to her."

"Yes, my lord, her ladyship has doubtless not recovered from her Monday's illness. Dr. Melville told me to warn you she required the greatest care and attention."

"Monday's illness," repeated the Earl. "Why it was only on Monday that I left her?"

"She was out most of the day, my lord, and she came home looking quite worn out. She was so bad we sent for the doctor."

Illness explains many things. Rex forgave Rosamond her petulance, her exactions; he

dismissed the maid, and strode upstairs with hurried, anxious step.

The door stood ajar and he went in. His wife's mood seemed to have changed now; the stony hardness had gone from her face; she was sitting in a low arm-chair weeping as though her heart would break. Rex closed the door, went up to her, and took her in his arms. She never resented the caress; she put her golden head down upon his shoulder as though it comforted her to rest it there, but she spoke no word.

"My darling!" cried the Earl, "why did you not tell me you had been ill?"

"I don't know; it was only the excitement of Monday. I am better now."

"I wonder if the doctor understood your case?"

"I think so; he seemed a nice man; but Rex, I don't want doctors or medicine. I want nothing in the world but to go away. Do you know if you had not come back to-night I should have started for Paris and then telegraphed to you what I had done?"

He soothed her as best he could, then when he had seen her quiet he took his hat, hailed a cab, and was driven to Dr. Melville's.

The physician received him courteously, but grew grave when he learned his errand.

"There is nothing in the world the matter with your wife, Lord Castleton, if you can keep her quiet and calm; but excitement is dangerous to her in a high degree."

"Did she tell you she had been on the stage?"

Dr. Melville threw up his hands.

"I thought she had been burning the lamp of life too fast! Take her away, my lord, to fresh scenes, where she can forget the glare of the footlights and the applause of the audience."

"I mean to go abroad, but I am newly come into my inheritance. There is an amount of business I must get through before I leave England."

Dr. Melville looked thoughtful.

"Why not run down to some seaside place—Brighton or Hastings. You could get up to London for a few hours a day, and your wife would be free from all associations that could be painful to her."

It was a happy thought.

"Rosamond," said the Earl, the next day at breakfast, "how should you like to spend a few weeks at Brighton?"

Lord Castleton caught at it.

"Of all things Rex, you could look after your business, and I could move without the awful dread of being pointed at as the actress whom Lord Castleton married out of pity."

"Pity for myself, Rose," said Rex, kissing her, and there and then the matter was settled. The Earl and Countess went to Brighton and put up at the Grand Hotel, where the beautiful Lady Castleton soon became the admiration of all beholders.

Reginald's business took rather longer than he expected. They had been a month at Brighton before he could fix a day for starting on their foreign tour; then one bright January morning, with his valet and Rosamond's French maid in attendance, Rex and his wife really took up their quarters in the Champs Elysees.

Of course the English newspapers were procurable. Rex brought in a whole shelf of them from his first lonely stroll, and his wife, in an idle moment, ran her eye down the agony column of the *Times* and saw this appeal:

"Wanted, the address of Miss Lestrangle, late acting in the New Theatre in November last. If this should meet her eye she is earnestly implored to write to H. B., Drogheada Villa, Hamwrynd Road, Camberwell."

The paper fell from Rosamond's hand, and she sank in a swoon on the sofa, murmuring,

"Only just in time!"

(To be continued.)



["WE ARE GOING FOR A SAIL," RENNIE SAID, INNOCENTLY; "WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN US?"]

NOVELLETTE.]

SUNBEAM.

—:—

CHAPTER I.

"YOU here, sir! I am half in mind to punish you by going home without saying good-morning," laughed a fairy-like maiden, as she tripped down the steps of a bathing-machine.

The roses on her cheeks deepened at the *rencontre*, while her rippling hair, damp with the salt spray, flowed around her shoulders in wild splendour.

"You needn't be so unkind. I assure you that I have been most discreet, and only perched myself on that friendly boulder to woo an appetite for breakfast; when lo! my eyes caught sight of the fairest nymph that ever basked in Neptune's crystal home. It was not my fault that the temptation to stay," he continued, "overcame me," as he took her soft, rosy hand in his own, and gazed into the blushing face, dash of mischief in his merry eyes, that caused hers to droop shyly.

This was an old trick of Locksley Tringham when near this tantalizing Hebe, and usually brought the carnation to her peachy cheeks. But now she disappointed him, out of sheer mischief by pretending to seek for shells and treasures from the deep, hidden among the silvery white sands.

"Have you lost anything?" he asked, audaciously, just to tease her, and compel her to glance up at him with those bewitching eyes.

"No. I was seeking for some pink seaweed," she answered, demurely.

The summer sun was shining and quivering over the wide expanse of sea at Hastings and also St. Leonards. Its golden beams fell on the handsome pier on the hills, the fishing-smacks, as they lay at anchor in the bay, on the

pleasure skiffs with their gaudily-tinted flags, and on the brigs, schooners, and big ships, that, in full sail, went steadily on their course far out at sea.

There were but few visitors on the Marina, for it was only just on the stroke of eight o'clock when the butterflies of fashion and hypocondriacal invalids were just contemplating leaving their downy beds.

A score or more of merry children, with flushed cheeks and dripping hair, were scampering off along with their nurses to breakfast.

"How is Jack?" he asked.

The sweet mignon face lit up with a radiant smile, and he felt an overpowering impulse to catch her in his arms and strain her to his breast till time was no more.

"Jack! dear old Jack is ever so much better; so much so that I stole out to have my dip earlier than usual, so as to give him all the morning. He is longing to have a morning on the sea, right away out, you know."

"How I envy your brother, afflicted though he is, poor fellow?"

"Why?" she questioned, in surprise.

"Need you ask me such a question? Is he not always with you? Are you not his guide, nurse, companion, all the world to him?"

"Yes, but see how I love him!" she said, simply. "Think of the happiness it is to be the eyes and guide of Jack? Dear old Jack!"

"If it wasn't that he is your brother, I verily believe I should hate him," Locksley thought, jealously, digging his cane spitefully into the damp sand. "I don't think she considers any fellow good-looking but him. It is Jack here, Jack there, Jack everywhere."

Locksley Tringham need not have felt so hipped at her warm affection for her brother. For she was glancing furtively at him, ever and anon, in a coy, shy manner, and thinking that the only man who rivalled Jack was his good-looking self.

Certainly, too, the little lady was right in her conviction. For he had a tall, shapely figure, a winning courtesy in speech, and a grand head, smothered with soft rings of brown hair that matched his roguish eyes.

A creamy Indian silk morning-jacket set off his figure by its very careless grace; and many eyes had danced and—yes, it must be admitted—even winked, to win a smile when he made his appearance on the Marina, in the orthodox hours, or at the assembly rooms, where they would cordially detest each other if one lady received a little more attention than another.

"What does this new doctor say?" he asked, breaking the silence. "Has he any hope of success in the case?"

"He is so very reticent that we can get no definite answers to our inquiries. It is very vexing," this wistfully.

"Perhaps he is studying the case, and finds it necessary to reserve his opinion till it is developed more to his understanding. No doubt it is a very perplexing one."

"Perhaps so," she assented, with a sigh.

"Come, Rennie! Cheer up, dear! There's no reason for you to despond. You are rich, and this blight is only a few months old. Wealth is power, you know; clever occultists are to be had for money. This one, to wit, whom I have heard has made some wonderful cures. Now reverse our position, and I should be in a hopeless plight, for I couldn't afford the great guns of their craft, and neither should I have a sweet, consoling sunbeam for a sister, to love and comfort me in my affliction."

"Fie, fie!" she chided. "An allwise Creator always compensates us one way or another, whatever our cross may be."

"Pray forgive me, Rennie. I spoke rashly. I hold myself corrected. I am a very clay-like mortal, while you are a sweet little spirit confined in a casket of crystal, pure and unspotted by its short tenure on earth."

"If I remain here much longer I shall get

conceited," she laughed rising, and going down to the sun-kissed waves that ebbed and flowed at her feet in tiny musical sipples.

She stooped to pick up an especially pretty piece of sea weed the waves had just washed to her feet.

"Is this not a treasure?" she observed, her face all smiles at her find.

"Will you give it to me?" he asked, eagerly.

"No; because I see another piece just as nice if you will stoop and get it."

"Pshaw! what is that, or cartloads of it to me, if your pretty hands haven't touched it?"

"Oh, here you are, sir!" she said, archly. "Perhaps you will take this and pick that other piece up for me?"

With alacrity he hastened to obey, and the lovers—for there could be no mistake about their relations to each other, though they had never confessed their passion—thrust the worthless pieces of sea-flower in their pockets, with a show of indifference, to keep them for ever after amongst their most precious treasures.

"Are you going to the ball?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so," she replied, as she bade him a hurried "good morning;" and sped like the flash of a sunbeam on a dreary November day from his presence into a gate which revolved, as she pushed it open—a wilderness of flowers, a stretch of cool, green lawn wheresoever an arm-chair beneath a wide spreading oak—a handsome youth, about eighteen, with a delicate face, the image of his sister.

She bounded towards him and snatched him out of his chair, linking his arm in a motherly fashion through hers, and led him to the rose-bushes, and picked a cluster of dewy buds and thrust them into his hand.

"Has the bell gone yet, Jack?" she asked. "I have hurried in; for you see I have been playing the truant, and the vases are not filled."

"The bell hasn't gone yet, Sis? Do you think grandpa will consent to our going for a sail?"

"I will coax, tease, badger him till he does," she laughed, filling her hands with some passion flowers, fragrant mignonette and roses and lilies.

"There goes the bell, Rennie!" Jack exclaimed, twining his arm round her slender waist.

And away they hastened to the open French casement, where a table was spread, gleaming with snowy napery and richly-chased old silver that caught up the sunbeams and made them dance merrily.

"See, grandpa, what treasures I have brought you!" Rennie said, laying her treasures before an old gentleman who was already seated at the table, unfolding a morning paper—one of England's true specimens of an English gentleman of the old school, from his irreproachable burnished boots to the crown of his silvery head—a keen sparring man, though nearly seventy years of age, and a generous, open-hearted friend to even his dogs.

He kissed the tiny, rosy mouth she placed so temptingly near his white moustache, saying tenderly,—

"You not only bring me flowers, my love, but a sunbeam too," patting her head, which was running over with flossy curls, whose golden tendrils would persist in straying over the broad, white forehead.

"Grandpa," she observed, coquettishly, nestling up to him when breakfast was concluded, "will you grant me a favour? Jack wants to go for a sail—do let him; I will take such care of him!"

"It is impossible, pussie, under the circumstances," he said, quietly, feeling sorry to disappoint his pet of any little pleasure she had set her mind upon.

"Old Saunders has promised to accompany us, and you know I can swim like a duck, and

could save even Jack if he tumbled overboard," she pleaded.

"Well, since Saunders is going, I suppose I must give in; but please do not practise any of your swimming feats."

"Not for the world, grandpa; I'll be as quiet and select as any old owl!"

And away she flew, nodding her golden head by way of shanks, to impart her glad tidings to the exuberant Jack, and also to don her new boating-dress of cream flannel, its pale blue silk trimmings setting off her witching beauty and figure to perfection.

As brother and sister were on their way to the beach Locksley joined them.

"Who would have thought of meeting you?" she remarked, innocently. "We are going for a sail; would you like to join us?"

"Of course he would!" put in Jack, with alacrity.

And Locksley thought she had never looked so sweet, with the lot of blue ribbons fluttering from her saucy sailor hat, and a glimpse of the soft, white throat just peeping from a nest of lace when her broad collar was tied.

He gazed upon the dainty picture, knowing the memory of it would last as long as his life.

"I shall only be too delighted," he assented, linking his arm in Jack's and admiring her into the smart little craft, whose white pinions were flying merrily in the wind, and brick-dust-coloured Saunders beside it, grinning all over his good-natured face.

Away they floated on the blue, dawning water; the snowy sails flapping and flowing gracefully, while the old skipper looked as proud as a hen over her fine brood of chicks.

A glee was proposed, and the three fresh young voices rang out clear and resonant, astonishing the sea-fowl, who flocked out of their hiding-places to listen and sing around their heads.

Then Locksley pleaded for a solo from Rennie, and she complied to the delight of old Saunders, who chuckled to himself,—

"Could any bird beat you bonny lassie? Why, her voice is just like a angel, it is! When I go to Davy Jones's Locker I hope that'll be the music I shall hear on the Jasper Sea."

On the fairy skiff darted till the cliffs faded from their sight, and poor blind Jack's spirits rose with the enjoyment of the hour; and he clapped his hands with glee, laughed, sang, and chattered till he almost forgot the terrible darkness which overshadowed his brief young life.

As all pleasure must have an end this was not an exception, and one and all seemed loth to return; but, at last, the grating of the sand beneath them told its tale; their delightful trip was over, and Sir Lyth had sent the pony carriage for them.

"You will come back with us?" urged Jack, as Locksley was about to raise his straw hat and bid them adieu.

It is needless to say he assented, and Rennie gave Jack just a wee bit of a squeeze of affection for his tact. A strong of curiosity-mongers collected round them to quiz the splendidly-appointed little carriage and its inmates, and to speculate if the harness was real silver or plated.

"How exceedingly touching, I might say pathetic!" observed a tall, vinegary-faced personage on the wrong side of forty; "a blind boy's guide; quite theatrical!"

"Isn't it absurd for a girl to go posing about in such a ridiculous fashion, instead of having a man to lead the poor fellow about!" observed a little pokey, sandy-haired girl, jealously. "I believe they are only nobodies who are trying their utmost to thrust themselves into society; besides, pony carriages can be hired."

"What arrant nonsense you are talking," snapped her companion. "Anyone with a grain of common sense can see that is no hired affair. The man-servant, the crest on the harness, and the magnificent ponies tell their own tale."

"Oh! I suppose you are going to fall down and worship this new fetish the men are all raving about!" snapped number one.

"I am sure you are free to do so, but I am no admirer of little baby-faced chits, whose fitting place seems to me the school-room."

"What date did you leave yours?" satirically put in a merry girl, who had joined them. "The time of the flood, I should imagine!"

"From your impudent manners I doubt if you ever had the advantage of one!" retorted the vinegary one, spitefully.

The merry girl laughed maliciously, and betook herself off, feeling she had had the best of it, while the others swooped down on the beach to ridicule and titter among themselves at the bathers.

When the trio arrived home, they found Sir Capel by the sea-side, he having gone on a fishing expedition with an old friend, so they launched together, and even dispensed with the old bather.

The glasses sparkled and jingled musically, as the three drank to each other, and somehow, the sweet little hostess' hands would get mixed up confusedly with Jack's, and Locksley's, and the last-named personage persisted in retaining it just to note the contrast of his sun-tanned one with the tiny snowdrift it looked when lying in his.

Of course all this was Greek to poor sightless Jack who acted as wisely as the most diplomatic mother could desire were she determined to bring things to a successful issue.

After luncheon Jack pleaded for music, seconded by Locksley, and of course the majority carried the day. Rennie sang song after song, and the birds caught up the melodies and chimed in their loudest, and Locksley became entranced as he bent over the sunny head to hear over her music. There was only one bairn in Locksley's bliss which persisted in obtruding itself into his mind—the thought that he was a poor man, while Rennie Allison was the idolized grandchild of a wealthy baronet.

"If I was only rich or she was poor," he kept mentally saying, "I could then have hope!"

And she sang on, her sweet notes vibrating through the room cut to the bees, and the flowers and the birds. Then she warbled "Twickenham Ferry," a favourite of Jack's, and he began pondering how delicious it must have been to be that stalwart young ferry-man, with the dainty maid in his boat; and devoutly wished he could be that fortunate individual, and Rennie the maiden, when a querulous voice said peevishly,—

"What a terrible noise you are making! It is ear-splitting, and even disturbed my poor parrot. Please shut up that horrid piano; you know I hate music!"

Poor Rennie sprang up in affright, and closed it with a bang. She did not relish being chid before Locksley, who looked on with amazement at the tall, gaunt figure, with its hair dressed in a fantastic, bygone fashion.

Her face was wrinkled, her faded blue eyes shifted and gleamed by turns, as if half afraid of the result of her own snappish conduct. A pink-muslin gown was confined round her thin waist by a blue sash; her attenuated wrists were tied with blueribbon, which dangled about her, making up the most grotesque figure Locksley had ever seen. It was as much as he could do to keep from smiling, as she pranced about with a huge fan which she used affectedly, as if to attract his admiration.

"You haven't introduced me?" she said to Rennie, sharply.

"I beg your pardon, aunt. This is Mr. Locksley Tringham," she hastened to reply. "This is my aunt, Elphin Lyth, Mr. Tringham."

He bowed, and Miss Lyth peered into his face with a vacant stare over her fan, and said with a smile,—

"Locksley Tringham! Eh, well, and a very nice name, and a very nice young man! You may visit me in my boudoir; I will always be at home to you after twelve! You will be a great favourite with my parrot; you

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“ have nice eyes, they are dark ones; he had grey ones, they deceive! Yes, I'll trust you!”

Poor Locksley looked appealingly at Rennie to hasten to his rescue, for the proposed visit alarmed him, lest she should wish to carry out the project then and there.

To his dismay she observed,—

“ You may come now if you like.”

“ Mr. Tringham is just leaving, aunt; he will have to defer the visit to another day,” interposed Rennie, seeing his plight.

“ You always thwart me in my wishes; you are like your mother,” she retorted, spitefully, gathering up her skirts aggressively and stalking from the room with the air of an injured queen.

“ Have you offended your aunt?” Locksley inquired, curiously.

“ Oh, no! It is her way. I am no favourite of hers, and as for poor Jack she simply ignores him.”

“ I am sure I am not the loser by that,” laughed Jack.

“ It is her affliction,” Rennie interposed, somewhat reproachfully. “ She has been weak of intellect many years, long before I can even remember. This is one of her bad days; but you seem to have taken her fancy, Locksley. You are one of the fortunate ones.” “ That remains to be proved,” he laughed, rustily.

“ I have heard some rambling story from old nurse Winter that she loved our father, and that the day he married our mother she became what you see her; even Jack's infirmity receives no pity from her. I verily believe she hates us both cordially.”

“ So long as she doesn't give you too much of her society why it need not ruffle your serenity; but a very little of her would go a long way with me,” he replied, with a shrug, for somehow the untimely visit had interrupted their harmony strangely. She had certainly plumped down with the proverbial wet blanket, much to Locksley's mortification.

Rennie, seeing the state of things, led her brother out on the lawn to his favourite seat, and then strolled through the cool shrubbery, where the flutter of her white dress caught the attention of Tringham, who, of course, hastened after her.

“ I thought you were comfortably ensconced beside Jack,” she observed with a *suspicion* of archness, which lent with a bewitching expression to her face that he longed to give those saxy ruby lips a kiss. “ I left you a charming book of *Kingsley's Return*, sir, to your allegiance!”

“ Jack is dozing, he says it is the sea-air; and—shall I confess?—I blessed Mr. Morphens, since it released me from my duty, to come and assist you.”

“ What in, pray?” she asked, mischievously.

“ Catching butterflies, bees, or any other diverting amusement!” she retorted, audaciously.

“ I can find you something far more humane and useful, sir! Go and get that basket and scissors from the tool-house, and help me trim the roses.”

Off he ran like a lamplighter to obey, while she smiled at his slowness, and wondered what life would be like without this merry, devoted, frank fellow, whom she had set up as her heart's idol.

“ What an enchanting day this is!” he remarked, as they busied themselves over their task. “ How on earth shall I ever return to my dusty old chambers and pore over those endless books? Ugh! it appals me to even to think of it.”

“ Don't think of it,” she said, softly. “ It is bad enough to suffer our ills when they arrive without anticipating them.”

“ Sweet philosopher,” he said, tenderly. “ It is you, and only you, that forces these unpleasant thoughts into my head. When I am near you all is bright and glowing; when I am away from you the world becomes dark and grey.”

“ Then I must have a very bad influence on

you, sir, and the sooner I banish you to your vocation in that delightful old Temple which you call dusty—”

“ I crave your mercy there,” he laughed. “ I meant my own particular den. It would be treason to speak lightly of such a venerable old pile, the nursery grounds of our St. Leonards, Cairns, and Broughams. But putting all jokes aside, it is a hard battle to fight when you are poor and unknown, all up-hill work. If I know one briefless barrister I know a thousand, gnawing their heartstrings with disappointed hopes.”

“ Poor fellows! How very pitiable!” she murmured, while tears sprang to her eyes at the picture. “ How dreadful it must be to be poor, to feel you have talents and energy lying latent and neglected for the want of opportunity or a friend with influence to assist you!”

“ That is what galls and crushes a high spirit, casts it back upon itself, till, in utter despair, it forces back the aspirations, defies them as mocking will-o'-the-wisps, to become an ordinary individual, below mediocrity.”

“ You must have suffered,” she returned, sympathetically, “ or you could never speak so realistically; so did my dear papa. He was poor, and a barrister when mamma married him. He succumbed after three years' bitter struggle against fate, and then died broken-hearted.”

“ But surely Sir Capel helped him?”

She shook her head, and answered in a subdued whisper, as if she was afraid the trees and flowers should hear her,—

“ They tell me grandpa never forgave him for jilting auntie; and refused even to see my poor mother till she was dying—yes, dying of grief for the loss of papa.”

The long-restrained tears now fell in pearly drops at the recital of the past, whose link was kept green by the gallant old nurse, who loved the lovely Kate Lyth, whom she had first served as maid and then as nurse to her orphan children, before and after her untimely death.

“ He was harsh, unrelenting,” he said, gravely.

“ That is what the world would say,” she said, quickly; “ but see how poor auntie's life was shattered? Think of her anguish, of its intensity, when it deprived her of reason! Surely poor grandpa had sore provocation.”

“ Was not your mother as dear to him?” he interposed, warmly.

“ Yes, oh, yes! He has proved his love and forgiveness to her by his devoted affection to us,” she said, loyally; “ and has even made a handsome provision for our future.”

“ I wish you were not so rich,” he interrupted, anxiously, “ for I feel assured it will bar our continued happy meeting.”

“ Why should it?” she asked, simply.

“ Because I love you,” he whispered, passionately. “ Love you so dearly, so wholly, that to contemplate an existence without you is a thousand times worse than the thought of death; and I know Sir Capel would never consent to give you to a poor, miserable, briefless barrister.”

A shade came over her face, for his words sank deep in her heart. She felt their truth, and her tongue refused the comfort she yearned to afford him. She dared not bid him hope after the experience of her ill-fated mother.

“ You are silent, Rennie?” he said, brokenly. “ You know how hopeless, how miserable will be my fate! If I were brave enough to tempt its decree—if I was rich—would you give me this little hand?”

She drooped her golden head; the sun was shedding a glorious halo around, and murmured,

“ Riches to me seem dross; but your love would be more precious than the whole world.”

“ Then you do love me?” he answered, rhapsodically.

“ Stay, do not misconstrue me, Locksley. I love you, yes; but I would never do what my

dear mother did—hamper your untried life; disobedience never could or would prosper.”

“ Then you would not make a sacrifice for one you love?” he asked, impulsively. “ You would not marry me without Sir Capel's consent?”

“ Certainly not,” this firmly. “ It would be the act of an ingrate. No happiness could succeed anything so base.”

“ And yet you admit you love me?” he argued, moodily.

“ But I love honour best,” she replied, chidingly.

“ You have conquered!” he exclaimed, seeing that sweet young face looking so sad and wistful; and, for a mad, swift moment, he caught her to his throbbing breast and held her firmly, and gazed in those forget-me-not eyes with a wild, delirious burst of overwhelming passion whose floodgates were freed after a terrific storm, and their breath mingled as he beat over her, while her pulses seemed to dance with the ecstasy of the delicious moment—that divine minute when two hearts beat with one accord, and two souls become absorbed—lost, as it were, in each other's identity.

“ Let me go!” she sighed, all her maidenly reserve rushing back upon her dazed senses; and he, abashed at his temerity, released her, pleading humbly to be pardoned for the impulse, which, loving her as he did, was impossible to resist, as it was for that young sapling of a sunflower that nodded its pale yellow head over them to hide its face from the warm, loving sun.

Suddenly she sprang like a young antelope out of the shrubbery in affright, crying,—

“ Here is grandpa coming in, I must go,” and he saw her join Sir Capel, who was riding through the gates on one of his splendid hunters.

“ I had better get out by the paddock,” he said to himself, guiltily, for the enormity of his behaviour in winning the heart of the wealthy Baronet's granddaughter rushed upon him at that instant when he watched Rennie fly like a frightened bird from his arms.

She tripped beside him up to the house and patted the glossy neck of Baron, who neighed his appreciation, and poked his cold nose caressingly into her hands; and Jack, hearing the bustle of the return, woke up and groped his way to them to be eagerly questioned as to his morning's exploit, which he, in return, raved about as being the jolliest one he had spent since his stay in Hastings.

“ So you had young Tringham with you as well as Saunders?” the Baronet remarked. “ A very nice arrangement, for he is a good seaman I hear, and a capital fellow. Where is he, little sibyls?” this to Rennie, as he pinched her cheek.

“ He has gone,” she replied, her eyelids drooping shyly.

“ Gone, has he!” he repeated. “ He should have stayed to dine with us.”

“ He did lunch with us,” she ventured to confess. “ Didn't he, Jack?”

“ Yes; he is no end of good fun, too grandpa, and the kindest and nicest of fellows. I wish I could see him! I know I should admire him even more.”

How her heart kindled at Jack's praises of her hero, for that he was one she never doubted, notwithstanding the memory of that moment of supreme passionate excitement when he tempted her to cast all claims aside to link her lot with his.

“ Oh! you dear old Jack, you are a real darling!” she exclaimed, exuberantly, when they were alone, and hugging him round the neck vigorously. “ Shall I describe what he is like?”

“ Who's like?” he asked, a droll expression flitting over his face, as a flash of the truth burst upon him.

“ Why, who could I mean but our friend L——, I mean Mr. Tringham. You just now told grandpa you were sure you would admire him if you could see him. Please Heaven (this reverently) the day may not be distant when

your wish may be gratified; but suppose, in the meanwhile, I describe him, give you a word-painting of him, as it were?"

"Nothing I should like better," he replied, encouragingly,

"Well then, to commence; he is a good bit taller than you—"

"That I know," he laughed, "for I tried his height a long time ago."

"Please don't interrupt, sir," she pouted, "but permit me to go on, unless you can supply the particulars better than the artist. Well, I was at his height. As I said before, he is nice and tall, and graceful, and has such soft, brown hands, all full of little dimples at the knuckles; and feet—well, they are really petite!"

"I thought it was to be a portrait, not a statue?" he laughed, mischievously.

"I'm half in mind to go upstairs to my snugger and have a fit of the sulks, you nasty, plaguey fellow."

"You'll forgive me teasing you just a wee bit, Sis," he pleaded, half comically, half earnestly.

"Since you ask me to I suppose I must. Well, I had got to his feet. Now I'll jump up to his face, which is full of kindness, and his eyes are splendid, tender, large and—"

"And—"

"True!" she added, glibly; "his mouth firm, but oh! so sweet and tender!—with a soft brown moustache that matches his head, which is just like that head in the library of Apollo."

"By Jove, he must, indeed, be handsome, Sis. It is a blessing he isn't hiding near us to hear your description, he would think you had fallen in love with him!"

"Nonsense, sir," she rejoined, impetuously?

"What do you know about such silly things?"

"Only what my two foolish ears can catch, for my eyes are out of it, at any rate."

Another hug was the result of this speech.

And thus they chattered till the first dinner bell broke the spell, and Jack's man arrived on the scene to lead him off to dress for dinner.

As Locksley Tringham sauntered to his hotel he was certainly in a very miserable humour, for it seemed his day-dream would prove very short, though entrancingly sweet.

"If I was rash enough to confess my love for Rennie to Sir Lyth, after his relentless conduct to his daughter, who married a poor devil like myself, I should very probably be shown out by the obliging butler," he ruminated, "and get my sweet sunbeam into no end of trouble. That is a nice prospect, certainly, for a man who has met his fate, and loves to distraction!"

He tilted his hat over his eyes to shut out the very sun; it seemed to mock his misery by its garishness. Many pretty maids and matrons passed the tall, lithe, handsome fellow, who never deigned even to give them a cursory glance of recognition, try as they might to evoke one of those radiant smiles they each and all coveted so much—for he was a great favourite among the fair sex.

"It would be better to leave this and return to my books," he thought, sadly. "There is not the faintest chance of ever wringing a consent out of Sir Capel to our union; it is maddening to even think of it!"

And although the afternoon was glorious, and the air laden with the scent from the new-mown hay, that came in puffs across the sunny slopes, and his feet were sinking in a sea of flowering grasses, he passed by nature's sweets and glories completely oblivious of them, with but one distracting thought rising in his mind—the necessity of leaving his little sea-fairy, the only woman who had ever stirred the depths of his deep, lovable nature.

"She will learn to forget me in time!" he sighed. "Yes, it's only a battle with self!"

Looking up vacantly he saw exotics being placed in the entrance to the assembly rooms—tall, spiral aloes, and graceful palms—in readiness for the grand ball; and, strange to relate, all his resolutions to quit Hastings were cast aside—for that day at least.

"It would be churlish, ungentlemanly even, to sink off now," he argued with his flexible conscience, as he hastened his pace and gained his hotel.

CHAPTER II.

Fairy forms were floating around the rose-garlanded ball-room, while the cool, still sea, lying clear and calm beneath the starred canopy of the greyish-blue heavens, could be seen from the open windows.

A silvery crescent-moon bathed the night-flowers, and their fragrance stole in to mingle with the baskets and banks of their culled companions, to ravish the hearts and senses of the human flowers.

It was not an ordinary dance, but a grand *fête*, the proceeds of which were to be devoted to a hospital; so that only the *crème à la crème* were the order of the night, and accounted for the arrangements being conducted in such a complete and superb scale.

Lady Louisa Mortimer, a most charming woman, took charge of Rennie, who eclipsed every girl in the room by her beauty, which was heightened by the simplicity of her crystallized tulle dress, that sparkled and glinted, vying with the diamonds that clasped her throat and arms. A tiny spray of mountain ash lay coiled between a cluster of brilliants in the braids of her sunny air.

"She looks like a white rose spangled with dewdrops!" That is what the only son of Lady Mortimer whispered in his mother's delighted ear.

"If I could only win her!" he murmured, "I'd be the happiest fellow under the sun!"

And Sir Tracy Mortimer was worthy even the queen of the ball, being one of the finest Saxon types of manly beauty—broad-shouldered, deep-chested, with crisp flaxen hair, and dark blue earnest eyes—a pet with all the girls wherever he went. In fact, the most of his time was spent, without any desire of his own, among fair devotees.

They haunted and sought him, they laid little traps to meet him to make engagements with them, to get him to their side. In the morning lounge, on the sands, on the promenade, the ride, the drive, or the reunions of the night, there they were by his side.

And now they all flocked around him like so many beautiful bees around a honey-jar, each looking at him her sweetest to catch him for a dance, while he stood gazing longingly at the crystal-robed fairy seated beside his mother, perplexing his brain as to how many dances he could coax her to grant him.

Plucking up courage he said,—

"Miss Allison, the 'Sailor's Waltz' is just about to strike up. Will you favour me?"

She glanced up with those large, wondering eyes of her's without a vestige of shyness and replied,—

"Yes, for it is my favourite. I play it to Jack, and he joins in with the voice part."

"You will think me presumptuous, but I am putting down two more," he said, half nervously, half jocularly.

"I must say nay," she interposed, calmly.

"Why?" he protested, a shade of deep disappointment crossing his face.

"Because I prefer to sit and look at the dancers without fatigue."

"I must, of course, yield to your wishes," he replied, returning the perfumed programme into her pretty white-gloved hand with a sigh.

As Locksley entered the room his eyes were dazzled for a moment, and then they wandered in search of his heart's idol, and he saw her whirling round in the mazy waltz in the arms of Sir Tracy Mortimer, his eyes bent upon her full of rapturous fire, and his voice lowered to whispered tones of softness.

A pang, almost as of death, smote him, and he shivered with jealous agony; he never knew the extent of his passion till that supreme moment.

When the waltz was over, Rennie, who had caught sight of his pale face as she flitted so close to him that her skirts brushed him, made her way to him.

"You could not wait for me," he said, reproachfully.

"Certainly not, sir; you should not tarry," she retorted, merrily, anxious to chase away that look of pain in his face by rallying him.

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had tarried till it was too late," he remarked, with a tinge of rancour that vexed her, and determined her to punish him for his evident jealousy.

"Pray excuse me, Mr. Tringham. I see an old friend; I must speak to him," she observed, hastily; and away she floated in her crystal robes towards a small old gentleman with an eyeglass propped artistically in his eye.

Every pulse in Locksley's body throbbed with pain, every fibre of his heart was sick, for he deemed her fickle, cruel—nay, heartless—to treat him with such cutting indifference, after that scene in the garden, too, when her head had lain on his breast, and she had murmured out that she loved him.

Completely reckless, and smarting with fierce resentment, he fell a willing captive to the wiles of a handsome girl, whose eyes had entreated him to dance with her, if ever eyes spoke a language.

When Rennie saw the couple scud past her she sat down beside her chaperon aghast, and her short upper lip quivered and then curled with anger.

After the dance was over she watched the handsome blue-clad girl go towards the refreshment buffet with Locksley; and yes, horror of horrors, she was blushing and he was smiling, and whispering into the tiny waxen ear, in which gleamed a lustrous sapphire.

She bit her lip, and the tears nearly sprang into her eyes.

"He is a flirt," she murmured, "an arrant good-for-nothing flirt, and I will never—no never—speak to him again!"

"Why do you not dance, my love?" Lady Mortimer asked. "There's poor Tracy dying to have another."

"I prefer looking on; the night is warm, and I get so insufferably hot."

"Which makes you look prettier than ever," put in her ladyship. "I like to see the roses in preference to the lilies; they suit you better."

After a bit she escaped to the terrace to breathe the fresh, warm night air. She slid down on a seat in the shade of an azalea tree. The sound of laughter and merriment came from the room, the rich streams from the music floated through the glass doors; the flowers sent forth their countless odours, and rose at her feet—all charming things in themselves, but they grated inharmoniously on poor Rennie's heart, for she was now in the throes of real miserable jealousy. All pleasure—the pleasure which she had been anticipating with such girlish delight—had fled, and she felt an irresistible impulse to have a good cry; so, like a foolish little thing, she pressed her throbbing temples on the rails and commenced to weep silently, when someone touched her on the shoulder, and giving a little shiver she looked up to see Sir Tracy Mortimer, to her intense disappointment and shame—shame to feel that he had been watching her, and seen her grief.

"Miss Allison, dear Miss Allison!" he said, tenderly, bending over her with deep concern; "what has made you unhappy; can I offer you any comfort? Has anyone dared to annoy or offend you?"

"No; a thousand times no!" she rejoined, almost brusquely, dashing away the sparkling tears that were plashing like pearls on her bosom. "I have only a fit of the blues, that is all."

"Then permit me to drive those nasty blues away."

"I don't want them driven away," this defiantly. "I like to be sad sometimes; showers are as necessary as the sunshine."

"But not at a ball," he protested. "I feel sure somebody has vexed you. I only wish I knew who it was."

"Suppose a lady had been the culprit, Sir Tracy?" looking up with the old flash of good-humour in her face, for hers was too good a nature to be long cross with anyone.

"Well, that would, of course, be rather awkward," he stammered. "I could not very well punch a lady's head, though I might do it mentally if I knew her; but, joking apart" (this earnestly, as he caught her hands and gazed down into her face, his eyes ablaze with a rash, wild project), "Miss Allison, Rennie, my love! let me be your comforter now and for ever!"

His words leaped out in a torrent before she could prevent their utterance.

"Sir Tracy! indeed—"

"I forbid you to crush out my hopes till you have heard me!" he interposed, excitedly.

"I have loved you. Oh! since when? Is it possible to even remember? From the moment I, a little unhappy boy, was banished from the dessert table for disobedience, and you, like the ministering little spirit you were, followed me, and placed your little hand in mine, and said, 'Dear Tracy, I will come and play with you, and then plead with your mamma to forgive you.'"

"And you haven't forgotten that?" she said, gravely.

"Forgot it? No; and never shall. Oh, Rennie, I can never forget you while my heart continues to beat!"

"I am so sorry!" she sighed, plaintively. "I am not a flirt whose pastime is winning hearts to break them. I had no idea you cared for me like this!"

"Are you going to crush all my hopes, then?" he asked, brokenly. "Surely you can leave me a shred to cling to, if—if no other has won your affections? I don't want an answer now. I will be content to wait!"

"Please forbear!" she said, rising and facing him calmly, soothingly. "Every word you say stabs me, for I can never grant you what you ask; it is impossible!"

"Then you love someone?" he ejaculated, huskily. "It is impossible that you could reject one who loves you so dearly if it were not so!"

"Pray question me no more!" she pleaded. "For the sake of the time when you admit I was your friend and consoler, let me be both now. If I cannot be all you wish, I can still be that if you will permit me."

"I may in time," he said, feeling, in his cruel disappointment, as if he should choke; "but not now," and looking up she found he had gone.

"Was ever girl so wretched as I?" she moaned. "I seemed doomed to make everybody miserable. I wish Jack and I could live in a wood all by ourselves; I am sure we should be happy, and then no one could make me vexed and I couldn't vex them. I had better go and find Lady Mortimer."

Then the horrid thought crossed her that she was not a very presentable figure with a tear-stained face.

"If I could only catch a glimpse of a glass," she said to herself. "I know I must look a regular little fright!"

Then a vision of stately loveliness in pale blue darted across her active brain, and she pictured to herself Locksley whispering more sweet little subtle nothings in that jewelled ear, and in revenge she crushed some of the waxen blossoms out of her bouquet and—shall we admit it?—stamped her dainty foot on them viciously.

"Why, Rennie, you have given me a terrible fright. I have hunted everywhere for you!"

It was Locksley's voice, and for the moment she would have given the world to have flown out of his presence—out of his reach—but she could not stir, for the heart will be true to itself in spite of will; so instead of flight she sat on

and held her pretty, diamond-crowned head over her crushed flowers guiltily—humbly.

He gently wound his arms round her, and little silly Rennie burst into tears.

"My darling, my love, why have you run away from me to-night?" he whispered. "Why suffer a cloud to come between us? I have borne martyrdom!"

"Why did you dance with that fright of a blue girl, and make her simper, and blush so?"

"I might retaliate why did you give the first dance to Sir Tracy? But I won't, because it would mar the joy of this happy moment when I hold you in my arms and see the sweet love-light dancing in your eyes. Oh, my love, I am well repaid for my wretched jealous fears now. I was nearly crazed when I couldn't find you!"

"Then you did not dance again with her?" she asked.

"Why, my darling, my pet aversion is big women. They seem to overwhelm one. By Jove! I don't fancy I could screw up my courage to propose to one; she would have to propose to me and marry me, too. I shouldn't have a voice in the matter. By-the-bye, I met Sir Tracy looking as white as a sheet. I stopped to question him about you, and he scowled and dashed past me."

"Did he?" she murmured, innocently. "Perhaps he was thirsty, and wanted some claret cup."

"Thirsty! Botheration take the fellow, he might have been civil!" he laughed. "But who cares, fairy, for indeed you are one in reality to-night (holding her at arm's length to view her perfectly), now that we are reconciled. Listen, sweet one, while I whisper ever so softly, that even the trees and the flowers may not hear our delicious secret, that much as I believed I loved you I never knew its power till to-night. You shall be my guiding star through life; for your sweet sake I will work night and day to win a name worthy to lay at your feet; armed with that I will come boldly to Sir Capel and ask him to give you to me. To-morrow I start for town to work earnestly with one of the grandest prizes for my reward that ever spurred a man to do or dare!"

"And may Heaven prosper you!" she said, reverently.

The twinkling stars shone down upon them, and the moon shed a soft radiance on her fair face, and he bent his to hers in the hushed night and responded fervently,—

"Amen," and sealed the petition with a kiss, not of passion, but of grave, earnest solemnity.

It was a radiant face that met Lady Mortimer, one so changed that she positively marvelled at its wondrous transformation; her rippling laughter floated here, there, and everywhere, and happy smiles reigned in place of tears, while her eyes sparkled with a soft, liquid fire.

"What a little fast creature that girl is!" thought the damsel in blue, spitefully, as she watched Locksley and Rennie chattering and laughing together like magpies over their ices. "It's a pity her chaperon doesn't put a stop to her hoydenish behaviour!"

Too indignant to stop to see more of their happiness she took herself off in a rage to show him he was not the only handsome man in the room, fondly cherishing the belief that she would bring him back to her feet when he saw her smiling and luring in her toils another victim.

For she thoroughly imagined herself to be irresistible, and far surpassing Rennie in her petite loveliness.

Some big women have that expanse of good opinion of themselves which match their stature, forgetting the choicest gems, pictures, and works of art are generally the smallest in size.

Lady Mortimer could not help noticing her son's air of melancholy, and put it down to a feeling of jealousy at the evident pleasure

Locksley and his partner evinced in each other's society.

"Quite a little coquette," thought her ladyship, not too pleased at her laughing, frolicsome conduct. "This must be curbed before any mischief occurs. Tracy, do kindly go and tell Miss Allison I want her," she said, with resolution.

"I would rather not," he answered, gloomily. "I never care to act the death-head at the feast."

"What do you mean, dear?" she asked with concern. "Have you quarrelled with Miss Allison?"

"Quarrelled, mother! Certainly not!" he protested, petulantly. "I only brought matters to a crisis, and, but plague take it, the wound rankles; it is fresh."

"I can supply the rest," she said, pityingly, "she refused you. Well, perhaps it's for the best, dear son, though I would rather it had been otherwise."

"If you will excuse me, mother, I would like to leave this garish place; it mocks me in the mood I am in."

Taking his hand she pressed it tenderly by way of assent. She deeply sympathised with him in the hour of his trial, for he was very dear to her—her only son, and she was a widow.

"Who is that gentleman you were so friendly to, dear?" Lady Mortimer asked, later on, when Rennie had returned to the shelter of her wing. There was a sparkle of reproach in her eyes as she looked into the animated face searchingly.

"An old friend of grandpa's and Jack's," she answered, evasively, her face crimsoning guiltily under the scrutiny.

"He was dancing the first part of the evening with Miss Ellice, that fair girl in blue. I thought he was engaged to her for some time, they appeared on such lover-like terms," she said, with a depth of significance in her gentle voice to test her listener.

"You are perfectly mistaken," she hastened to reply, innocently, "he doesn't care a straw for her."

"How do you know that? Men are sometimes gay deceivers, my child!"

"He is not; oh, no! I would trust him with my life. He is the soul of truth and honour. Jack says so, and I endorse what Jack thinks."

"There is no hope for my poor boy," sighed her ladyship, somewhat bitterly, for she had hoped it would turn out but a girlish flirtation. "I can only hope he will prove worthy of her."

There was no son to arrange her wraps, to attend to those small, but important, details so necessary by its custom; and she felt almost resentful when Locksley, all smiles, came up and offered his services to her first, and then devoted himself to the delightful task of helping to enshroud the glistening little figure of Rennie, in her dainty white satin cloak, and conducted them to their carriage.

Lady Mortimer felt hipped and mortified at his seeming triumph over her absent son, and her thanks froze on her lips in return for his courtesy.

During their short journey they both preserved a kind of tacit silence. Rennie's thoughts were engrossed with her love-dream, while her companion pondered over the vexations of life, of the light of hope Sir Tracy had when they set out for the ball, and how confident she had been to return with her as his bride elect, never dreaming for one moment that the delirium of love had ever touched her innocent heart.

"It is too bad," she let escape, pettishly, in her cruel disappointment.

"What is too bad, dear Lady Mortimer?" Rennie asked, simply.

"That pleasure is so brief and fleeting," was the evasive answer, and they both relapsed into silence once more.

CHAPTER III.

"Going away?" Jack gasped, in tones of dismay, the morning following the ball, when

Locksley called to bid them all good-bye. "I thought you were going to stop as long as us?"

"I might have had that intention, dear boy, but second thoughts are best, as a rule."

"I shall miss you very much, so will my sister. I had hoped you would have seen me through this next operation."

"If I could do you any good, Jack, rest assured I should stay whatever my inclinations were, but I could be of no use to you under the circumstances, as perfect quiet will have to be maintained after it is over."

"Do you think there is any hope of their curing me?" he asked, piteously.

"I pray earnestly their efforts may succeed this time!" he replied, gently. "There is no doubt yours is a very trying case, and rather difficult to combat with; these blights always are so, I hear. But keep up courage, dear boy; everything is possible with human skill and Heaven's grace."

"I wish I could feel hopeful. Do you know there are times when I wish I was dead?" murmured Jack, a sob catching his throat. "This eternal darkness seems to be my doom, to cling to me from year to year! It would have been better to have been born blind, for what I had never enjoyed I could never have missed. I am strong and hearty, longing to run like the wind, and yet chained down like a useless log! Oh! Locksley, it is too hard to bear without rebelling against such a cruel fate!" and great scalding tears fell from those sightless eyes, whose anguish would have made an angel weep.

Two soft arms stole round his neck, and a warm, peachy cheek nestled caressingly against his stained face.

Rennie had heard their conversation unnoticed.

"Jack! dear old Jack! am I nothing to you that you should talk so hopelessly? I love you, and will never leave you! My eyes, and hands, and feet are all yours now! Have you forgotten how you used to carry me across the brooks and ditches, and swing me for hours down by the old pear-tree when I was a weak morsel, and you were so strong? You never deserted me then to play with other boys fit and able to amuse you, but devoted yourself to your silly little sis, and I am going to be what you were to me then!"

The recollection of their merry, frolicsome, childish days chased away all gloomy thoughts from Jack, and they were soon laughing and chattering away as happy as three crickets.

It is ever thus with youthful natures; smiles and tears seem to mingle—so, in fact, leaven their existence.

"Good-bye, darling! my heart's idol!" Locksley was saying, as they lingered for one brief moment beneath a friendly hedge. "When I have made a position fit to bring before Sir Capel, I will ask the boon of this little hand. I should only jeopardise my cause if I was rash enough to declare my love now!"

"Yes! oh, yes!" she said, wistfully, "it would be useless. We must wait, dear; time is ours. Besides, much as I love you, I can never leave Jack while he is blind."

"What if he should never be cured?" he asked, hoarsely, a terrible fear rushing madly through his brain.

"I dare not think of anything so terrible!" she replied. "But, if Heaven so willed it, I should never leave Jack!"

As he made his way to the station, those words would persist in ringing in his ears,—

"I should never leave Jack!"

They haunted him, and that night he commenced to send up long, earnest petitions to Heaven to restore sight to Rennie's brother.

The operation was performed, but no result followed of any consequence, to the surprise and disappointment of the onlookers; and, finding no improvement, Jack began to tire of Hastings, as all invalids do whose hopes have been dashed. The weather, too, helped to drive them away, for it seemed to take an ill-natured fit by deluging the roads and streets with rain and wind; wretched, gusty, tumul-

tous storms that blew you nearly off your feet, and turned the sandy paths into slush.

Poor Rennie moped and fretted at the loss of her lover and her enforced confinement to the house; so the end of it was all the household packed up, and prepared to return to their old home in Hampshire.

As if to mock them, the sun shone out gloriously as they took their seats in the express, and the sea never looked more alluring as it sparkled and rippled tantalisingly in the south-easterly breeze.

"I declare we haven't had such a day for a week!" grumbled Rennie. "And I do verily believe it is going to be splendid now we are leaving it! Spiteful old sea!" and Sir Capel laughed at the tiny pucker that gathered on his pet's brow.

But she soon regained her good-humour, especially when she espied the old family chariot waiting for them in the station-yard.

"Dear, old Glenthorn!" she cried, gaily, "there is no place half so nice after all!" and her pretty eyes drank in the scene with delight.

The distant woodlands were flooded by a thin, purple haze; lesques of golden gorse shimmered in the setting sun's rays, a scent of wild thyme lingered in the air.

Rennie smiled a recognition to an old shepherd who stood baa-headed to see the squire's carriage and its occupants.

It was a glorious afternoon, or, rather, early evening, and never had Glenthorn looked so fair.

The house itself was an old-fashioned, red-brick mansion, mantled over with hoary old ivy, which tried, and not in vain, to cover every vestige of the glaring red bricks. It stood aloft on a rise, and was backed by sheets of green woodland; a broad terrace ran round the front, and sloped down to a velvety lawn, beyond which ran the river, where, beneath the sedges and tangled weed, bonny fine trout could be seen frolicking in peaceful content.

Hand-in-hand, Rennie and Jack visited all their favourite spots—the stables, the doge, the venerable pear-tree where the old swing used to hang, but which decay had set its devastating sythe upon now; and its poor, tottering limbs looked grey and gaunt, a pitiful contrast to a jaunty young Maria Louise, that held up its stately head, all crowned with golden fruit, impudently, almost aggressively, as much as to say,—

"You've had your day, old man; please make a little more room for a younger favourite."

The dogs yelped and barked and yapped their delight, and sprang on Rennie, to the detriment of her pretty pink cambric gown, while Jack caressed and patted their curly heads or sleek ones, and whistled to them; while they, sagacious creatures, whined and laid their great paws in his hands as if they knew it was not right to be boisterous with him in his sore affliction.

"Them looks well, sir—I mean, miss," said a grey-headed groom, who felt he would like to cut his tongue out for being such a fool as to refer to the young master, for he could see Jack's lips quiver with pain.

"They seem bonnier than 'ever, Gough," Rennie said, winningly. "The beauties! They are crazed with delight to see us back; and you have been very, very good to them, I can see!"

"I wish Locksley could only see our home," she said, enthusiasmately; "he would be enchanted with it; wouldn't he, Jack?"

He, of course acquiesced, as he always did in her opinions; and it was a happy group who sat down to the dinner-table that evening. Even Aunt Eleanor seemed to be infected with the feeling, and simpered and twittered about fusilly, even going so far as to sit in the drawing-room while Rennie sang "Home, sweet home," in her sweet, pathetic voice.

"I used to sing that once," the poor lady said, confidentially to Jack. "They used to call me a nightingale when I was young," and she essayed to join Rennie in a shrill,

cracked voice, beating time with those restless fingers that never would be still.

Sir Capel kindly asked her to desist, and like a child she obeyed, but betook herself off in a tantrum to her room.

When the letters were laid before the Baronet next morning at breakfast, he gave a start of surprise, and ejaculated—

"Why, children, your uncle is on his way back from Australia. It seems he is tired of roaming."

"Is he going to remain, grandpa?" Rennie asked.

"I hope so, for it is time he attended to the estate, as he, by the order of nature, must soon be master of it."

Strange to say, the news brought no smiles of pleasure into Jack's or Rennie's faces; it was a feeling of dread that took its place, for well they knew their Uncle William bore them no good feeling, he having refused to forgive his unhappy sister Kate for her ill-starred union, and the dire consequences it caused to his favourite sister Eleanor.

William Lytton was a widower with one daughter, who had been sent to Paris for her education which now was completed, and it was principally for her sake that her father had made up his mind to quit Australia, and take up his life once more in his ancestral hall, to install his daughter in it as the mistress.

Another letter conveyed the intelligence that Lady Mortimer and her son had determined to winter in Rome.

"Some coming, some going," the Baronet said, half-aloud, and Rennie's breakfast seemed as if it would choke her, for well she knew who was the cause of the departure of the Mortimers.

"Tell dear Rennie we should have liked to have run down to say good-bye," he read out; "only Tracy is anything but well, and the doctor says he wants immediate change, so we must fain obey."

"A rather sudden attack of illness," the baronet observed. "Why, he was well enough the other day!" He did not notice the swift paleness, or the drooping of those truthful eyes, as Rennie stammered out deprecatingly.—

"Illness sometimes comes upon us quickly, grandpa; look at poor Jack; how his eyes were all right in the morning and by the evening he could not see!"

"Yes, dear; but that was different. But here is a letter for you, Jack; shall I read it, or would you prefer Rennie?"

"You, grandpa, please," he answered, eagerly.

"The Temple.

"DEAR JACK. (Oh! how her heart throbbed at the magic word 'Temple'.) —

"Though absent you are all green in my memory, and many a weary sight escapes me as I plod over my books, and look out to see a wilderness of chimney-pots, and contrast it with your Arcadia at Hastings; and in place of the clear, sparkling waves have to content myself with grey, murky old Father Thames, and its rotten old tubs—they style steam-boats. I was awfully grieved to hear no better result followed your operation; but keep up heart. Science is still in its infancy, and I am making inquiries to find someone more skilful than you have hitherto come across. Give my kindest remembrances to Sir Capel and your sister. Tell her I have found out seaweed makes a capital barometer. And now, with my very kindest regards, believe me ever your affectionate friend,

"LOCKSLEY THINGHAM."

The allusion to the seaweed made the warm blood leap into her face, for well she knew the hint and its meaning.

"A very nice letter," the Baronet remarked. "It is a thousand pities he is only a poor struggling barrister; he seems worthy something better!"

"Could you get him something, grandpa?" she said, impulsively. "Oh! I would love you so dearly if you would!"

"I might procure him a billet in the Treasury if I could get Lord Helmore in the humour. Old Mordan is about to retire, so there is a vacancy, if it could be contrived."

"Oh, grandpa! if you can only bring it about I would be forever grateful; and as for Mr. Tringham why, he would never cease to thank you," she exclaimed, bubbling over with delight.

"You seem to take an uncommon interest in this young spark?" he laughed good-humouredly. "I hope, little sunbeam, you haven't lost your heart and left him to find it!"

Deceit being repugnant to Rennie, who was as candid and true as the sun that poured into the room, always impulsive, she sprang up and turned her arms round the old gentleman's neck and whispered,

"Would you be dreadfully angry, dear grandpa, if I said I did like him just a wee bit?"

"Humph—er—well, I cannot quite say," he returned awkwardly. "You know he is very poor, and that is bad to start with."

"But he is very clever," she urged, coaxingly, "and perhaps you could get him this appointment you just mentioned."

"You little chatterbox, you seem to have taken everything for granted," he returned, smiling at her eager face.

"You cannot go from your word, grandpa; you whose word is so sacred, that to get it, if ever so softly whispered, is to know your boon is granted."

"Little wheeler, I wish you wouldn't have such a knack of making an old stupid of me!" he said gravely.

"Then you will try to get him in the Treasury, and you won't be angry with me for liking him a little bit?"

"I will do my best, but mind, there must be no love-making till I see him, and inquire for myself if he is worthy so rich a prize as my little sunbeam."

She promised 'ever so faithfully, and smothered him with kisses from her dewy lips, and twisted his snowy hair round her rosy fingers into ringlets, and hugged him till his spotless shirt-front and tie became tumbled and creased beyond recognition.

"Now I shall have to change this," he observed, ruefully, "and I am late already for my appointment with Mr. Denton."

"Are you going shooting?" she asked.

"Yes, my love, I am going to bring you some partridges for dinner."

She glanced up at the grey haze that hung over the earth, shutting out the sun, which in revenge shone out in a huge crimson ball of splendour.

"How dull it has come overhead," Rennie said, a little shudder running through her frame. "It looks like a funeral pall trying to shut out that red globe."

"Fudge! little sentimentalise," he retorted, patting the golding coronet caressingly. "It seems to me you are getting quite a dreamer since that rebel of a Tringham stole a large piece of your heart from your old grandfather."

"No man, if he were an Emperor, could do that," she answered earnestly. "I can never forget what you have been to Jack and I."

"I have tried to redeem my harshness to the dead," a sudden break in his voice, "but the task has been a light one with two such dutiful children as you have been; but there, chatterbox, I must not delay any longer, Denton will fume like a town bull."

"I wish I didn't feel so oppressed," she thought, dismally, "I'm getting a real hypochondriac when the days are cloudy. What a nasty old woman I'll be if I give way to such nonsense!"

Then her thoughts took another turn, and she began to picture Locksley in his lonely rooms among the stacks of chimney-pots, and wondered where he had put that piece of seaweed—if it was on his writing-table or chimney-piece, or in his pocket. Then the sudden coming home of her uncle flashed across her

active brain, and she wondered what kind of girl this unknown cousin would be; if fair or dark, tall or short, and if they would like each other, when her musings were arrested by the hurried entrance of the Baronet equipped for his day's sport.

"Good-bye, sunbeam," he said, joyously; "wish me good luck."

"Grandpa, I—I wish you wouldn't go to-day!" she exclaimed, impulsively.

"In the name of goodness, why?" he asked, with surprise. "I thought you were so fond of partridges?"

"It isn't that, it isn't that!" she faltered; "but it is so cold and cheerless, and I am all of a shiver!"

"You've caught a chill; go to Winter and ask her to give you some of her herb tea, and keep out of the grounds," he rejoined, cheerily.

The gamekeeper, approached gun on shoulder, to attend his master. Rennie caught hold of him, as if to detain him.

"You are quite feverish, child," he said, anxiously, and placing her on a chair, rang the bell for Winter to attend her young mistress.

The glass door was opened, and he was about to descend to the lawn, when glancing back over his shoulder to see if the bell had been answered, Rennie sprang after him, and he turned back and kissed the pensive little face that looked into his with a piteous entreaty that made him feel very uncomfortable, and he said tremulously,

"Heaven bless you, and hold you in its holy keeping!"

Then she strained her pretty eyes to watch him as he kept pace with his stalwart companion with a graceful, springy step that many a man a score of years his junior would have envied.

And still she stood there, a white-robed little figure, the primrose ribbons confining her slender waist fluttering in the wind. The soft tendrils of hair ruffled from off her broad white forehead. The Baronet turned when he got to a rise in the ground and saw her there. He shook his hand playfully, while she blew a kiss to him, and then he was lost—gone.

(To be concluded next week.)

HIS TENANT'S DAUGHTER.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE MISSING LINK.

"Show her into the drawing-room," Margaret says to the maid, who is about to open the front door; then she disappears, and the servant obeys.

"My mistress will be with you directly," says the servant, and closes the door after the woman, who is not a little surprised at being so promptly admitted.

Her appearance is not calculated to impress a servant with a sense of her importance.

She is naturally plain; she is more than middle-aged, and there is an expression of coarse cunning on her face which makes it repulsive.

Her dress is plain but neat, and it is evident to Captain Vincent that she is carefully "got up" for the occasion.

He is sitting motionless as a statue, with his back against one of the heavy curtains which hang by the sides of the bay window; he is quite in the shade, and the woman, who as the door closes upon her, supposes herself to be alone.

This is apparent from her walking to a looking-glass and arranging her bonnet. Then she glances round the room, and says contemptuously,—

"Hump! pretty enough, but small; not like Boscombe Castle. Pity I quarrelled with that young fool who will soon be master

there; for if he marries Maggie I might have found a home there."

She has said this aloud; but a faint movement makes her turn in the direction of the curtain, and she utters a cry of alarm as she recognises the blue eyes and sunburnt features of Captain Vincent.

"Law! how you startled me, sir!" she gasps, sinking upon the nearest chair. "I didn't know there was anybody here but myself!"

"So it appeared," returns Vincent, curtly. "Why do you come here?"

"I came to see little Maggie," is the answer, with a fawning smile, which quite fails in its purpose.

"Why do you want to see Miss Maggie?" asks Vincent, sternly.

"I came to tell her about her mother," is the oily reply.

"Suppose you tell me about her mother," says the Captain, coolly.

"And what shall I gain by that, sir?" is the prompt retort.

"More than you will gain by talking on the same subject to anyone else," he answers, sternly. "Miss Margaret will not see you; and you have done your worst, as far as her father was concerned."

"I've done my duty, sir," is the reply, with something that looks like genuine indignation. "A man as kills his wife deserves to be hung; and I'd like to go and see him swing!"

"Captain Earl did not murder his wife," Vincent says, quietly and slowly. "He can prove beyond all doubt that he was in Exeter with his daughter for some hours both before and after his poor wife was found murdered in Boscombe Park."

His words, and the air of conviction in which they are uttered, produce a palpable impression upon the woman. And she asks blankly,

"Then who did murder her, sir?"

"Ah! there is the mystery!" he replies, sadly. "Who was there in this world who had a motive for getting her out of it?"

The woman is silent; possibly she fears to say too much, and Vincent continues,—

"If you think of it, Walsingham Earl had no motive for getting his wife out of the way. The law had made him free from her, and had given him the custody of the child. She had her own money settled upon herself; but if she had been starving he was not bound to support her. Why, then, should you assume that he would desire to take her life?"

The woman thinks for a few seconds longer, then she says suddenly,—

"You was fond of her once yourself. Wasn't you, Mr. Vincent—Cap'n, I mean?"

The soldier's face flushes. Some of the never-to-be-forgotten pain which filled the past comes back to him, and he replies sadly,—

"Yes, I was very fond of her; but she only regarded me as a boy."

"Well, you were a boy then, sir," is the uncompromising answer. "You looked younger than your years, and she couldn't think of you as anything else. But having cared so much for her in the past, you'd have some feeling for her in her misfortunes."

Vincent makes a sign of assent, and the woman continues,—

"I don't mean to say as how Captain Walsingham hadn't good cause for getting a divorce from his wife. She'd got tired of his strict ways; and her head was turned with flattery; and the way she was admited, go where she would, was wonderful. She'd got her own money too; and though it wasn't a great deal, she and me might have lived very comfortable if she hadn't been too fond of looking in the glass."

"Looking in the glass!" repeats Vincent, in an inquiring tone.

"In the wine, sir," is the brief but explicit explanation.

"Go on," he says, as he pauses.

"Well sir, we lived pretty comfortable on the whole. Five hundred a-year ought to have been enough for us; but we got awfully short before the next payday came round; and when the money was low, and she'd time to think, my mistress was always fretting for two things—her child, and the man she loved."

"What man?" asked Vincent quickly.

"Ah! that's a secret," is the answer. "There was one man whose name never came out in the divorce proceedings; he was to marry her when he was free. But his wife had money; exposure meant ruin to him, and my mistress was true to him from first to last, whoever else she betrayed."

The woman straightens the folds of her dress as she says this, as though pluming herself upon the possession of some special virtue.

"That man was Eric," says Vincent quietly.

"How do you know?" is the startled question.

"Never mind," is the answer. "We will talk of that later on. What took your mistress to Devonshire?"

"Well, two things. First of all, she wanted to find this man, and his wife's property was in Devonshire, and she thought she'd hear of him there; and next, she wanted to see her child. While Maggie was at school her mother was warned that the police would arrest her if she went to the house; but we heard when she left school, and we knew she'd gone to Devonshire—somewhere between Exeter and Torquay—and nothing would suit my mistress one day but she must start off to Devonshire, and alone, too."

"Well?"

"I wanted her to stay till after quarter-day, and give herself a new rig-out; but no. Go she would, and go when she would; and we didn't part the best of friends, for she wouldn't sign no paper, and I couldn't draw the money without her."

Vincent restrains the impulse to say, "of course not."

He wants to learn all that can be learnt, and, with a sinking of the heart, he realises that mistress and maid had gravitated to the same level, and that the latter had from habit grown to address the former on terms of equality.

"So I didn't think much of not hearing from her at first, but I couldn't get on long without money; and when I found she hadn't drawn her quarter's income I knew she must either have fallen into a good thing, or have come to grief; so I set out to find her. I knew pretty well which way she'd gone, but it took me months to get upon her track. I looked for anything but that she should come to such a dreadful end."

The woman pauses. There is much that she has left untold—notably, her attempt to extort money from Sir Denbigh Rivers; but Captain Vincent has heard all he wishes to hear on all subjects but one, and he asks suddenly,—

"Who is Eric?"

"You want to know too much!" replies the woman, with a laugh.

"At any rate, it is what I must know," says Vincent, gravely. "If you don't tell me now for a consideration, you will have to tell the judge at the trial for nothing."

"Why do you want to know?" asks the woman, her eyes brightening.

"I have a very sufficient reason," is the answer. "That man must be found."

"Well, I don't see why I should keep his name secret any longer," the woman says, after a little further hesitation. "He's taken good care to keep out of my way. His name is Haberton—Percival Eric Haberton; he was in the — Dragoon Guards, but he ain't there now."

"If he is alive we'll find him!" exclaims Vincent, with energy. "Here are a couple of pounds for you, and let me have your address.

You may be wanted at any hour to identify this man."

"But how am I to live?" demands the woman. "I came here thinking Miss Maggie would take me into her service. She'll get her mother's money, and I've served her mother these twenty years. I was with her before she was married. Tain't fair that I should be left in my old age to shift for myself!"

"If Miss Maggie gets her mother's money, she will be quite sure to provide for you out of it," says Vincent, gravely; "but she will never take you into her service, make up your mind to that. Her father would forbid it!"

"As if I'd live under the same roof with him again!" exclaims the woman, with a frown. "Not if I know it; I've had enough of him; and if he didn't kill her, I'm still glad he's had a taste of prison. If his wife was bad, he helped to make her. Them's my sentiments; but I thank you for this trifle, sir, and for your kind promise about Miss Maggie!"

She takes up the two sovereigns which lie upon the table as though they were, indeed, a trifles.

Her visit has not been in vain if it insures her a provision for the rest of her days, and though this may not be on a very liberal scale, she is not without resources.

Twenty years spent in the service of a reckless woman, who was always well-off at the beginning of each quarter of the year, however poor she might be at the end of it, had afforded rich pickings to one inclined to save; and Sarah Jones will not be reduced to poverty, whatever else may happen.

When she is gone, Vincent takes out his pocket-book and writes down the name she has given him.—

"Percival Eric Haberton."

Then he sighs deeply—sighs for the frailty of the dead, the wickedness of the living, and rapidly thinks over his present course of action. He is still deep in thought when Maggie re-enters the room and asks,—

"She is gone, isn't she?"

"Yes," he replies.

"And did she tell you the secret you wanted to know?"

"Yes, she did, and I must start for Devonshire without delay," he answers, gravely.

Then suddenly he asks,—

"Did you ever hear the name of Haberton at Boscombe?"

"Oh, yes; there was Colonel Haberton and also his son. They were both on a visit at the Castle, but the Colonel didn't stay long."

"Ah, Colonel Haberton; that is the man I want. Did he take any notice of you?"

"Yes; he looked at me strangely, and I seemed to remember him, and yet it is all vague; but I think he must have known my mother when we were at Brighton, before I was taken away from her. I remember saying so to papa at the time, but he bade me never speak of my mother."

"Ah! What date was that?"

"It was the day after I came to Cedar Cottage—the third of December."

Vincent makes a note of the date, then marks meditatively,—

"The day before the murder!"

Maggie shivers, then she says gravely,—

"Yes, I have been looking at a diary I keep. I left school on the second of December. I was with papa in Boscombe Park on the third, when we met Sir Denbigh Rivers and Colonel Haberton, and papa took me to Exeter on the fourth of December. We went to a theatre in the afternoon, and dined at an hotel afterwards. It was about nine o'clock when we returned to Cedar Cottage."

"Take care of that diary," says Vincent, briefly. "For your father's defence it is invaluable. And now I am going to Devonshire at once, and I think I had better put up at Cedar Cottage. I shall hear of things there that I shouldn't elsewhere. Smith is there, isn't he, and he can take care of me?"

"Yes. I will write a note to him at once," is the answer.

And Maggie sits down at a writing-table while Vincent mentally sketches out his own course of action.

A few hours later, having in the interval paid a visit to the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland-yard, Captain Vincent is on his way to South Devon.

What he expects to find here he scarcely knows, but the impression is strong upon him that he must go to Cedar Cottage without delay, and for Cedar Cottage he accordingly starts.

Maggie, meanwhile, has thoughtfully telegraphed to Smith to have supper ready and a room prepared for a guest by nine o'clock; so that when Captain Vincent arrives he is agreeably surprised to find lights burning and Captain Earl's faithful servant waiting to receive him.

Smith is suffering under a sense of injury which he is at no pains to hide.

He remembers Captain Vincent perfectly, and waits upon him as though he had been his master; but when supper is over his grievance finds voice.

His complaint is that his master has not trusted him, that he has shown his want of confidence by going away and keeping his whereabouts a secret, and he expresses his conviction that his master would not be in prison at the present moment if he had been less secret.

"I got warning of what that she-devil was going to do," he adds, bitterly, "but I didn't know where to send it! I wonder at myself that I didn't wring the woman's neck when she came poking her nose about this place asking for 'Miss Maggie'! And I told her then, if it hadn't been for her, Miss Maggie's mother would have been alive and held in honour, instead of being buried as a nameless outcast!"

"I suppose you didn't see the body before it was buried?" asked Vincent, quietly.

"No, sir; but the master did," is the significant reply, "though he never breathed a word of it to me or to anyone, as far as I know."

"Yes. There was his mistake; but it was very natural," replies Vincent, sadly.

And Smith knows by the tone that he is for the time dismissed.

Three days pass by, three days which Captain Vincent seems to spend in viewing the beauties of the neighbourhood, and in talking genially with everybody with whom he comes in contact.

In this way he picks up a good bit of information about the family at the Castle, their friends, and the tenant of Cedar Cottage, the news of whose arrest for the murder of the woman found dead in Boscombe Park has agitated the rural mind amazingly.

But he learns nothing that will help him or that will confirm the theory he has formed; and on this, the fourth day of his arrival, the funeral of the late Lord of the Manor, Sir Denbigh Rivers, is to take place.

Impelled by natural curiosity to see his successful rival, rather than from respect to the departed, who was a stranger to him, Captain Vincent walks to the churchyard, followed by Smith, who is to tell him the names of such of the mourners about whom he may be curious.

The churchyard is crowded. Boscombe and Barmouth have turned out in hundreds, and Vincent is standing by a yew-tree close to the newy in which stands the enclosed space where lie successive generations of the Rivers' family, with Smith at his elbow, when the procession leaves the church, and wends its way slowly towards them.

"That is the eldest son, Sir Thurston Rivers," says Smith, and Vincent looks at the young baronet, not with envy, but with the frank acknowledgment of a generous nature—that Margaret Earl has chosen well between them.

In looking at his rival, Vincent scarcely

heads the names which Smith repeats in a low tone, until that of "Colonel Haberton" falls upon his ear.

Then he asks,—

"Where? Where?"

And, as if with the instinct of conscious danger, the Colonel turns his haughty eyes in the direction of the speaker.

Their eyes meet, and Colonel Haberton becomes very pale, for he recognises Smith as the companion of the stranger, and he guesses rightly that the latter is there to identify him.

But the funeral train passes on, and Vincent makes his way to the neglected grave in which lies the body of the woman whom he had once so hopelessly loved.

Here he observes a pale-faced, intelligent-looking boy, who is placing some wild flowers upon the green sod.

The crowd of people are at the other side of the churchyard, and he and Vincent are practically alone.

"Why are you doing this, my boy?" asks the Captain, kindly. "Did you know the poor lady who was buried here?"

"Yes, sir; she gave me a shilling," is the reply; "and never a day passes but I think of her."

"How did it happen—tell me?" says Vincent, eagerly. "I knew her years ago, when she was young and beautiful."

The boy looks at the speaker with quick sympathy, then glances round nervously, and says, in a frightened tone,—

"Colonel Haberton threatened to break every bone in my body if I ever spoke of it."

"I'll protect you against Colonel Haberton," asserts Vincent, promptly; "only tell me the truth. The whole truth, mind, and instead of being injured, you shall be well rewarded."

"Well, sir, this is the truth. I was on the road to Maldon when I met this woman, and she says, kindly, 'My boy, would you like to earn a shilling?' and I says, 'Yes, ma'm.' And she says, 'Take this note to Boscombe Castle and ask if Colonel Haberton is there. If he is, give it to him, and if he isn't, bring it back to me.' So I took the note to the Castle, and the butler said he'd give it to the Colonel; and I went back to the lady and told her so, and she gave me the shilling. And that night she was found dead in the park; just where I'd left her."

"You can swear to this, my boy?" asks Vincent, with repressed excitement.

"Yes, I can swear to it; but don't let the Colonel touch me."

"Don't be alarmed. You are safe enough from Colonel Haberton while you are with me," replies Vincent, and he laughs with a sensation of triumph, as he mutters to himself.

"This is the missing link. Earl shall be set free, and Margaret's mother shall be avenged."

CHAPTER XXVI.

BUN TO EARTH.

The day after the funeral of Sir Denbigh Rivers, Colonel Haberton drives over to Boscombe Castle, and asks boldly to see Miss Rivers.

From the little he has already heard, he knows that changes are very shortly to take place in the household, and he has determined to stand on no false delicacy, but to ask a question at once—the answer to which will decide him as to his future course of action.

Ina Rivers comes into the room where he is waiting for her, looking pale, dressed in deep mourning, but perfectly self-possessed, as though nothing her visitor could say had power to distract her.

"My dear child!" cries the Colonel, impressively taking her hand, and keeping it in his own, when she attempts to tear it away; "how grieved I am to see you desolate like this! Give me the right to protect and

cherish you, to devote my life to your service. Be my wife, and let us leave this dull place, and leave the world and all our cares behind us."

Ina Rivers smiles a little sadly ere she replies,—

"Do you forget, Colonel Haberton, that you are old enough to be my father?"

For a moment he is disconcerted, then he replies, audaciously,—

"I am not so old but that plenty of women would be glad to marry me."

"I am not one of the number," replies Ina, coldly, "so please do not revert to the subject again. You know that my father would never have approved of my making such a choice."

"No, he preferred my son, Percy," retorts the suitor, with a spicce of malice, "but Percy is engaged to be married! I knew that when he went to his aunt there would be no hope for him! She always wanted him for one of her daughters!"

Ina Rivers feels her face grow pale, and a sharp pain shoots all through her heart; for since she refused Percy Haberton she has thought of him kindly, has almost persuaded herself that she loves him, and the news that he has consoled himself for his rejection with the smiles of another is a blow to her vanity, if not to her affections. But she hides her mortification, as women will hide far greater pain, and more complete humiliation, and she says quietly,—

"I hope Percy will be happy! He is a nice boy. I sometimes have wished that he was my brother; but I must leave you now, Colonel. Thurston has gone to London, and Lady Rivers is waiting for me, she is too unwell to see you this morning."

"Is this your final decision?" asks the soldier, while an ugly frown distorts his handsome face.

"It is!" she replies, "Good-bye; we can be friends!"

And she offers him her hand at parting. But now he has nothing to gain, and nothing to lose, the naturally brutal nature of the man asserts itself, and he tosses her hand away with a contemptuous action, as he says, scornfully,—

"Friends! Enemies you mean!"

And without another word he marches straight out of the Castle, leaving Ina Rivers to congratulate herself upon having kept clear of the influence of such a brute.

Meanwhile Colonel Haberton's horse suffers for his master's disappointment, until he also begins to rebel, and something like an accident would speedily occur if the master did not begin to soothe the animal instead of using the whip.

They have nearly passed through Barmouth, when a gentleman, recognising the Colonel, signals that he wants to speak to him, and the latter pulls up and alights.

"I don't know that I ought to tell you, Haberton," says Squire Penrueth, in a low tone; "but a warrant is about to be issued for your arrest! I refused to sign it myself, as a friend; but there are others who will!"

"A warrant!" repeats the Colonel, his jaws falling. "On what charge?"

"Murder!" is the reply. "The murder of that woman whose body was found in Boscombe Park! I thought I'd tell you! Good-day."

And the speaker walks on, not so firmly convinced of his neighbour's innocence as he had previously been. Colonel Haberton utters not a word. His bluster is all gone.

Here is danger indeed—a danger that will prove fatal if he cannot destroy certain evidence, which since that dreadful day he has neglected to dispose of! He has thought of it often, has meant to get rid of it; but it is not an easy matter to completely destroy the greater portion of a shirt, and leave no trace behind, not so much as a charred button, or calcined powder, that would defy detection. To throw the torn shirt away, or to tear it up still further, and then let a servant take it away would only attract attention; so there it

has remained, rolled up amid important papers in an iron chest, of which the Colonel always carries the key. But if search is made by the officers of the law, this damning piece of evidence is sure to be found, and this will prove his guilt beyond all question.

His intense desire is to get home, to destroy this at all hazards, at all cost; then, if he can get away before he is arrested, well and good; but, even if he cannot, he can afterwards defy all the infernal evidence that can be brought against him.

During that drive he never utters a word. His mind is too much occupied for speech to be anything but pain, and the servant, who has observed his changed countenance, momentarily expects that the horse will bolt and the dog cart will be upset. But this does not happen. They arrive at Maplehurst safely, and Colonel Haberton leaps to the ground like a lad of twelve, and mounts the flight of stone steps leading to the terrace upon which the house is built, two at a time, swiftly as a man of twenty.

Without a word to anyone he ascends the broad flight of oak stairs to his own bedroom, locks the door, hangs something before the keyhole, then goes to an iron safe that is bricked in with the wall.

His face is ashy pale; his nerves and muscles are strung to their utmost tension; and if it were not for his iron will he would shriek aloud with agony, for a cruel pain which has of late been no stranger to him contracts his chest, and will not be stifled.

A few minutes—only a few minutes—then he will seek the medicine that will mitigate his suffering; but minutes are precious.

Already he has the safe open, and the bundle of white linen in his hands.

He allows it to unroll; and there is a good shirt, perfect save for two wide strips torn lengthways out of the back, one of them being a trifle shorter than the other.

No one knows better than the guilty man how accurately the two pieces of linen with which that unfortunate woman was strangled in Boscombe Park would fit into this mutilated garment. And while the pain at his chest grows more unbearable, he takes a lamp that stands upon a table, empties the oil upon the linen fabric, and, striking a lucifer match, sets fire to the whole.

Brightly the oil burns; but the eyes of the man who set it alight may not feast upon the flame. The contraction of the chest increases; he has had slight attacks of *angina pectoris* before now, but nothing like this. The agony he suffers can find no vent in moans. Sharp and sudden the end comes, suffering the most intense agony that is most intolerable; but in this case Nature forestalls the hangman, and Percy Eric Haberton falls dead by the flaming linen which he had himself lighted!

If the police had not come to arrest him, a few minutes, after, the whole mansion would probably have been in flames. As it was, the guilty man's clothes had begun to smoulder, though, strangely enough, part of the shirt, upon which the oil had not fallen, had refused to burn.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

THOUGH the June sun shines brightly, the days are long and dreary to Margaret Earl. She has received a letter from her father, in which he speaks of the charge made against him as preposterous; while he strictly enjoins her not to come to the House of Detention to see him.

From the newspapers she gathers that if the case goes to trial her father will be taken to Exeter; and likewise she learns that Lord Melcombe has offered to be surety to any amount to obtain Captain Earl's immediate release.

"It is awfully good of him!" she thinks, gratefully. "But I am glad I acted as I did. Lady Mildred Greystone will be a more suit-

able wife for him than I; and if I had yielded then to the temptation of becoming a peeress how wretched I should have been now!"

She presses her hands upon the bosom of her dress as she thinks thus, and the rustle of paper underneath convinces her that her treasured letter is safe—that the message it brought to her troubled heart was real, and not the result of her own imagination.

Maggie has no visitor except the aunt of Captain Vincent, who is old and naturally inclined to take a gloomy view of life; and she has declined Mrs. Wynn's invitation to return to Beckford.

Conscious that people stare at her curiously as the daughter of the man who is in prison on the charge of murder, she shrinks from leaving the house, and most of her time is spent in the garden at the back, where the tall leafy trees hide her from curious eyes.

Thurston Rivers had not said what day he would come to her, and the very uncertainty keeps her in a flutter of anticipation; but this afternoon—full week after the receipt of his letter—she is sitting in the arbour at the bottom of the garden, with a small table by her side, upon which are books and needlework, when a shadow stands between her and the light, and, looking up, she sees Thurston Rivers standing before her.

Maggie will long remember this moment, with a blush at her own impulsiveness. One instant, and she is on her feet; the next, and she is clasped in her lover's arms—strained to his breast; their lips meet, they are all in all to each other, "The world forgetting and the world forgot," and they might hesitate to break the spell of the bliss that is upon them by a spoken word, if a voice immediately behind the young Baronet did not ask sternly,

"What is the meaning of this? Long am I have been away, I find that I am here all too soon!"

"Captain Earl!" exclaims Thurston, in dismay.

"Papa! dear papa!" cries Maggie, throwing herself upon her father's breast, and refusing to be repulsed. "Oh, I am so glad you are back again—so glad!" she repeats, clinging to him and kissing his hand. "I have so wanted to come to you!"

Captain Earl is softened by his daughter's evident delight at his return; he kisses her brow, disengages himself from her clinging embrace, then says dryly,—

"You seemed to be making yourself very comfortable in my absence. I did not expect to find Mr. Rivers here!"

And he looked sternly upon Thurston, as upon an intruder.

"I am very glad to see you are free, Captain Earl!" says the younger man, extending his hand; "and I hope that, for Maggie's sake, you will reconsider your decision and accept me for a son-in-law!"

"Yes, for my sake!" pleads Maggie, taking the hands of the two men and placing them together. "I cannot live without Thurston, papa. He loves me, and you will gain a son instead of losing your daughter!"

Her tearful eyes, her earnest words, melt the proud heart of her father, and he says huskily,—

"But I have promised you to Vincent."

"And I have told Captain Vincent that I won't marry him!" cries Maggie.

Whereupon her father shrugs his shoulders, then smiles indulgently, and says:—

"A wilful woman will have her way!"

His hand closes upon that of Thurston Rivers as he says this, though he adds significantly,—

"You know the heritage of shame which you will take with her?"

"It is not for me to judge the dead," replies Thurston, gravely; "and under any circumstances I shall be proud to call Maggie my wife!"

"And what will your father say?" asks the Captain, with ill-concealed irony.

"My father is dead," is the quiet answer. What Captain Earl says neither Thurston

nor his daughter distinctly hear, for he turns away, walks into the house, and for a full hour they see no more of him.

Three months after this Sir Thurston Rivers and Margaret Earl are married at the pretty little church at St. Cyril's.

The marriage is necessarily private. The Dowager Lady Rivers has refused to grace the ceremony with her presence; but the bridegroom is not at all sorry at the absence of his stepmother.

His sister comes, and stays a few days with Maggie before the interesting event takes place; and here it is, in the little garden that was the scene of his rejection, that Charlie Vincent meets the woman who is really to be his fate.

It would take too long to tell how Ina Rivers fell in love with the man who had begun to look sadly upon life, nor how he long hesitated to propose to one so much younger and more wealthy than himself.

Possibly Maggie, when she became Lady Rivers, helped the lovers over their difficulties. Certain it is, they ultimately surmounted them; and Ina Rivers, when she changed her name to Vincent, had not the least doubt that she married a hero.

But I am running ahead too fast. I meant to tell you something about Maggie's wedding-dress, which was of ivory satin, covered with rich lace; and of the wedding presents, which were both costly and numerous.

Among the latter was a set of diamond stars from the Earl of Melcombe, and a sapphire ring from Lady Mildred Greystone.

But bride and bridegroom start for their honeymoon, and Captain Earl gives up the house at St. Cyril, and returns to Cedar Cottage.

It is not want of means that decides him to live on here as before, but he likes the place, it suits his taste, and here he feels that he can hide away from the society of his fellow-men, when he desires to do so.

The revelations which Colonel Haberton's tragic death brought to light have convinced him that he was not himself blameless in the past.

But it is over now, and Smith knows that a change has indeed come over his master, when, one day, not long after his daughter's marriage, Captain Earl takes some flowers, and places them upon the humble grave of her who had dishonoured and betrayed him.

The bride and bridegroom stay long on their wedding tour, and Lady Melcombe is gratified by the engagement of her son to Lady Mildred Greystone before the happy pair return to Bescombe Castle.

Much to Maggie's discomfort, the tenantry give them an ovation, and men take the horses out of the carriages to drag them from the railway station to the Castle.

Very happy they looked; the bride lovely and timid.

Their troubles are past—a life of happiness is before them. And as Sir Thurston Rivers, with his bride upon his arm, enters his ancestral home, he feels that he has indeed been most fortunate in having taken to wife "HIS TENANT'S DAUGHTER."

[THE END.]

The recent earthquake in China was of frightful magnitude. The shaking of the earth was followed by a subterranean convulsion of the most appalling kind. The earth yawned until a frightful chasm was produced, from which red-coloured water was ejected, great tracts of land suddenly disappeared, and lakes formed in their place. The shocks continued for four days. More than fifteen thousand persons were killed. The aspect of the country has been completely changed.

FACETIA.

An auctioneer's epitaph—"Gone." MADE out of hole-cloth—Porous plasters. Ether might properly be put in the list of great composers.

A WASHERWOMAN is a cruel creature. She daily wrings men's bosoms.

You can generally tell a tree by its bark. Especially is this so of the dogwood tree.

If you find your grocer giving you short weight for your money, give him a long wait for his.

"Yes," said Quiggle, "I have a good deal on my hands just now." "So I perceive," replied Fogg; "why don't you try a little soap and water?"

LANDLADY (pouring a glass of water): "For some reason the water is not very clear to-day, Mr. Grumley." Old Grumley: "Yes, I noticed that the milk was muddy."

Two members of a church were recently caught kissing each other at a street corner after choir rehearsal. These delightful practices don't generally re-choir rehearsal.

"Do you know him?" asked a gentleman of an Irish friend, the other day, in speaking of a third person. "Know him!" said the Irishman: "I knew him when his father was a little boy!"

AN INACTIVE COMPOSER.—Scene: Foreign music shop. Fashionable Lady (to German clerk): "Has Schubert written any new songs lately?" Clerk: "No, madam; not since he died."

"Is that your dog, Squidig?" "Yes: fine animal, too. Here, Rover." (Whistles vainly for him) "He doesn't appear to obey very well." "Oh, that shows he's a pure breed. He's a tarrow, you see."

COUNTRYMAN (to furniture dealer): "I want to git a bed an' a mattress." Dealer: "Yes, sir; spring bed and spring mattress, I suppose, sir?" Countryman: "No; I want the kind that kin be used all the year."

JUDGE: "You say you want a divorce from your wife?" "Yes, if your honour please." "But reflect for a moment that you have lived together for nearly half a century." "Well, haven't I suffered long enough?"

A SPOILED DOG.—London Man: "It's a mystery to me how that dog you sold me was brought up. He won't eat anything but the best rump steak, and won't drink anything but beer. Where did you get him?" Dealer: "I bought him of a tramp."

"I am surprised, Bobby," said his father, reprovingly, "that you should strike your little brother. Don't you know that it is cowardly to hit one smaller than yourself?" "Then why do you hit me, pa?" inquired the boy, with an air of having the better of it.

A FEW days ago two men were in a barber's shop. One had red hair, and the other was bald-headed. Red Hair (to Bald Head): "You were not about when they were giving out hair?" Bald Head: "Yes, I was there, but they only had a little red hair left, and I wouldn't take it."

RECKLESS EXTRAVAGANCE.—Waiter (in West End restaurant to country groom): "Will you have wine, sir?" Country Groom: "Well, I doona; I hadn't thought of wine." (To bride) "What d'ye say to some wine, Maria?" Country Bride (shyly): "I don't mind, John," Country Groom: "All right; it's a go." (To waiter) "Yes, mister, bring us two glasses of elderberry."

A LESSON IN HONESTY.—A well-known broker was giving his son a lecture the other day. "Above all, my son, be honest. Let nothing drive you from the path. Only the other day, for instance, a customer of ours made a mistake in paying me an account. Instead of giving me four thousand he owed my partner and myself, he gave me five." "Well," "I gave five hundred of it to my partner."

SOCIETY.

The Prince of Wales has accepted the offer of the Duke of Richmond and Gordon to occupy Goodwood House for the race week. His Royal Highness is to entertain a choice selection of friends for the occasion.

The most interesting moment of the evening, at the recent State Ball, says *Modern Society*, in fact, the one for which alone it was worth the trouble of mingling in such a crowd!—was at eleven o'clock, when the Prince and Princess with their son and daughter, the Prince and Princess Christian, Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne, the Duke and Duchess of Teck, with Prince Adolphus and Princess May, the Duke and Duchess Paul of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, and about a dozen lesser Royalties or Serenities, entered the Throne Room, all attended by their respective suites. That was really a brilliant sight, the display of diamonds, orders, uniforms, and waving plumes, and costly dresses, all lending their effect to make it a splendid blaze of colour and glitter. The dancing was comparatively neglected—people wanted to walk about, and look at all the notabilities, and the strains of the band made a pleasant accompaniment as they strolled around—when that was possible; but it was more generally pushing, or receiving merciless puffs and trampings from others.

The Countess of Jersey gave her first afternoon party at Osterley the other day. The weather was delightful, and the well-wooded grounds looked their best. Horace Walpole, who said some hundred and thirty years ago that the great drawback to Osterley was that it had no trees, would be more than surprised at the present aspect of the park, were it possible for him to revisit it now. The house is full of pictures and works, but very few of the guests paid much attention to them. They found it more agreeable to float about on the lake or to consume strawberries and cream beneath the shade of the trees.

Queen Christina's visit to Valencia was all the more brilliant, that her loyal subjects there had almost given up the hope of seeing her in their midst. When the Queen visited the Cathedral carrying the infant King to the "shrine of the mariners and peasants," the Valencians went frantic with delight. Alfonso XIII. is getting rather heavy for this sort of thing, and he is exceedingly fractious and fidgety, under the ills that all (baby) flesh is heir to; so we hope the Saints took benevolent note of what a job that was for his pious mother on a hot day in June—in Spain too, where the days of early summer are warm indeed.

The meet of the Four-in-Hand Club attracted the customary gathering of Society people in the neighbourhood of the Magazine. Nineteen superb teams paraded, and competent critics pronounced each turn-out perfect in the matter of horses, grooming, paint, and polish. At the starting point were the Princess of Wales, the Princess Louise of Wales, and the King of Sweden. Lord Onslow with four noble blacks appeared on the scene first, and was followed by Lord Londesborough, and the regimental coach of the "Blues," with Lord Kilmarnock handling the ribbons.

WHEN the late Emperor of Germany was married to the Princess Royal of England, the boys of Eton demonstrated the great overflow of their enthusiasm and their utter want of employment by taking out the horses of the Royal carriage and drawing the bridal pair to the railway station. The sweet girl of the occasion is now an Empress, and one of the Eton boys who drew the vehicle has blossomed into a Governor of New South Wales—viz., Baron Carrington.

A SENSIBLE innovation was made lately at a flower-service at Southport; the baskets of flowers offered at the altar had a substratum of eggs and fruit in them.

STATISTICS.

HYDROPHOBIA.—The deaths from hydrophobia, which had risen in 1885 to 60—a higher number than in any year in our table, with the exceptions of 1874 and 1877—fell in 1886 to 26, and were fewer than in any year since 1869. Of these 26 deaths 10 occurred in London, while the remaining 16 were distributed as follows: Devonshire, 1; Derbyshire 2; Cheshire 2; Lancashire 6; West Riding 5. This distribution tallied pretty closely with previous experience, Lancashire and Cheshire being the counties that are found on an average of many years (1864-86) to have had the largest number of deaths from this disease in proportion to their populations, and the West Riding and Derbyshire also standing high up in the list. Could a census be taken of stray curs, the cause of this distribution would probably be apparent. In London, at any rate, the destruction of over 80,000 stray dogs in the nine months beginning with November, 1885, and the compulsory muzzling of all other dogs in the streets, appears to have been most efficacious; for while in 1885 the deaths from hydrophobia registered in London had risen to the unprecedented number of 26, in 1886 they fell, as before stated, to 10; and of these 10, 6 were registered in the first quarter, 2 each in the second and third quarters, and none in the last three months of the year.

GEMS.

This brightest life has its shadowy side: None more impatiently suffer injuries than those who are most forward in doing them to others.

We are sent into this world to make it better and happier; and in proportion as we do so we make ourselves both.

At least nine-tenths of those most successful in business start in life without any reliance except upon their heads and hands.

GENIUS without religion is only a lamp on the outer gate of a palace. It may serve to cast a gleam of light on those that are without, while the inhabitant sits in darkness.

Do your best, and await calmly the result. It is anxiety, not work, what kills: it is work, not anxiety, which commands success. There is a Hindoo saying that the fortune of a man who sits sits also; it sleeps when he sleeps, moves when he moves, and rises when he rises.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ORANGED STRAWBERRIES.—Place a layer of strawberries in a deep dish, cover thickly with pulverized sugar; then a layer of berries, and so on, until all are used. Pour over them orange juice, in the proportion of three oranges to a quart of berries; let stand for an hour, and just before serving, sprinkle with powdered ice.

ORANGE CAKE.—Two cups of sugar, two cups of flour, one-half cup of water, a pinch of salt, the yolks of five eggs and whites of three, three teaspoonsfuls of baking powder, and the grated rind and juice of one orange. Beat the whites, and add sugar for frosting; and the grated rind and juice of one orange. Bake the cake in layers, and put frosting between.

RHUBARB TARTLETS.—Make a short paste with one white and three yolks of egg, 1 oz. of sugar, 1 oz. of butter, a pinch of salt, and flour *quant. suff.*; work it lightly, roll it out to the thickness of a quarter of an inch. Line some tartlets with it, fill them with uncooked rice to keep their shape, and bake them in a moderate oven till done. Remove the rice, and fill the tartlets with rhubarb stewed with plenty of sugar and a dash of lemon juice, and at the top put a heaped spoonful of whipped cream.

MISCELLANEOUS.

GOVERNMENT owes its birth to the necessity of preventing and repressing the injuries which the associated individuals had to fear from one another. It is the sentinel who watches, in order that the common labourer may not be disturbed.

The Jewel to be presented to the Queen as the personal memento of the Women's Jubilee Offering will shortly be decided on by a special sub-committee of ladies chosen from the general committee of the fund. Altogether the offering amounts to £84 11s. from 8,162 25s. contributors. After providing for the Queen's Nursing Fund, the Prince Consort Statue in Windsor Park, and various expenses, there is still a surplus of some £4,000, for the personal ornament which the Queen will, it is hoped, "wear as an additional reminder of the affection of her subjects"—so says the resolution. The Duchesses of Buccleuch and Westminster, the Marchioness of Salisbury, the Countess of Stratford, and Lady Magheramore, compose the sub-committee selected by ballot to choose the jewel.

COCO LAND.—For those who find interest in what may be termed dietetic extravagances, we copy a Mandingo bill of fare left on record by an explorer: "Then followed gazelle cuts la papillote; two small monkeys served cross-legged and with liver sauce on toast; stewed iguanas, which was much admired; a dish of roast crocodile's eggs; some slices of smoked elephant (from the interior); a few agreeable plates of fried locusts, land crabs, and other crustaceans; the breasts of mermaid, or manatee, the grand *bonne-bouche* of the repast; some boiled alligator and some hippopotamus steaks." While this dinner does not equal in courses some of the elaborate feasts of civilized lands, certainly no one will say that it lacked variety. Lotus seeds form one of the most common dishes known to the Barri of Central Africa. The pods when gathered are bored and strung on reeds and hung in the sun for drying, after which they get to the table. Along the upper Nile another wing of the Barri tribe bleed their cattle monthly, and cook the blood with their flour and meal. They esteem this a luxury, and the dish is eaten with great relish.

A GIRL'S SAD LIFE AND DEATH.—There is a colour line in the old world more insurmountable and more permanent than any that existed in America at any time. It is the colour line against the gipsies. It demanded another victim recently. Joseph Dandoczy was the most talented and most promising pupil of the Conservatory of Klausenburg, Transylvania. He loved true classical music, but could not obtain admission to musical circles, where he might have had a brilliant career. His skin condemned him to play with his tan-coloured brethren at country hops and in music-halls. His auditors did not want to hear anything but drinking and street songs of the meanest sort. Many a time when Joseph would play the finest tunes to them they commenced screaming and stamping and challenging him until he threw down his fiddle in disgust. Twice he cut his throat in despair, but was cured and restored again to his hated occupation. One day in the beginning of December he had again been playing at a village romp and went home; his genius outraged with the low profanity he had been forced to make music for, and disgusted with the life he was compelled to lead. He locked himself up in his bare and lonely room, and began playing most unusual and thrilling fantasies upon his violin. The music grew wilder and wilder, and more weird and unearthly with each successive minute, until all of a sudden it ceased. As it was not resumed, the door of the room was forced open after a few hours, when Joseph Dandoczy, the gipsy musician, was found hanging from a hook. It was his third attempt at suicide, and that time he had accomplished his end.

July 7, 1888.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

W. W. M.—Consult the advertisement columns of the newspapers.

T. L.—To preserve asparagus for winter use, put it into boiling water, scald, and tin it.

THOMAS DICK.—It is no doubt a mild form of skin disease. Apply to the Hospital for Diseases of the Skin, Leicester Square.

DAISY.—There are many indications of such being the case, but we must really decline to prophesy about the weather. It is as variable as some ladies' temper.

CYNTHIA MATA.—1. Neatness and rather a masculine disposition. 2. Avoid all starchy foods and beer, or wine and spirits, and take plenty of exercise. 3. Auburn.

E. H.—To make a paste to clean brass, take soft soap, two ounces; rotten-stone, four ounces. Beat them well into a paste. Apply with a little water, and polish with soft leather.

S. N.—You will need the services of a lawyer, but we cannot recommend any particular one. Consult one in your own vicinity, who will be able to make the necessary inquiries.

L. B.—The hands may be kept dry for playing any instrument by rubbing club moss (*Lycopodium*) in very fine powder over them. A solution of alum and water will also prove of service.

W. S.—Castor oil and brandy are highly recommended to invigorate the hair. The proportions are three ounces of oil and one ounce of brandy. Rub well into the roots about twice a week, but do not use in excess.

A. S.—To polish horn, having scraped the work perfectly smooth and level, rub it with very fine sand paper. Repeat the rubbing with a bit of felt dipped in very finely powdered charcoal with water, and, lastly, with rotten-stone or putty powder. Finish with a piece of soft whale-leather, damped with a little sweet oil.

C. H.—To mend crockery ware, use the white of an egg and lime. Take enough of the egg to mend one article at a time, and a small quantity of lime shaved off for the purpose. Apply quickly to the edges of the broken ware, placing them firmly together. It is not well to make a large quantity of the mixture at once, as it hardens very soon, and rendered useless.

C. H.—The word peer in England is commonly used to designate a Lord of Parliament, all of which body (the House of Lords) are called the Sovereign's peers, not because they are in any sense equal in authority, but because they constitute the Sovereign's highest court. Members of certain classes, called peers of the realm, hold seats in the House of Lords by hereditary right.

A. B.—1. The wedding dress to which you refer was that of Queen Adelaide. It was embroidered with flowers, the initials of which formed her name. Even handsomer was the wedding dress of Maria de las Mercedes, Queen of Spain. It was of white satin covered with Alençon point lace, on which was worked the arms of all the realms into which Spain was formerly divided. 2. Handwriting fair.

B. L. K.—1. The original thirteen States were New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. 2. Kentucky was admitted into the Union, February 4, 1792; Vermont, February 18, 1791, and Tennessee, June 1, 1796. 3. West Virginia (out of Virginia) that went into the Union, December 31, 1862.

W. F.—Certainly the ostrich is raised for the feathers. They are domesticated in Africa, and the trade is enormous, amounting yearly to millions. The birds are fed and reared upon large farms for the purpose, and the feathers are worth about £60 a pound. They are sold in bulk, and afterwards divided into the choice lots and packed for European and American markets according to quality. Single feathers of extra length and weight bring very large sums.

G. S.—The sea is not made salt by any natural deposit of salt in its depths. Fresh water carries down with it the salts of sodium, magnesium, chlorine, &c. These are left in the sea by the evaporation of the water constantly going on, by which the moisture of the atmosphere is chiefly sustained. After ages of this process of evaporation the sea has become heavily charged with salts, and as ages roll on this saline quality will increase until the water absolutely becomes salt.

A. G. C.—You do not state whether the ivory box you wish to clean is simply soiled, or discoloured by stains. If it is only dirty, make a lather of white soap, lukewarm water, and spirits of ammonia, and scrub it with a soft brush. If it is stained, put it while damp, after cleaning, under a glass shade, and expose it to the sun. Wet it occasionally with clear water and replace it in the sun. After a few days the stains will bleach out. If the ivory has a plain surface, use soft flannel instead of a brush, but if it is carved the brush is necessary.

J. J. B.—The first thing in the case of bunions is to wear large and comfortable shoes. If the bunion is not inflamed put over it a piece of diaphylon or lead plaster, and upon that a piece of thick leather having a hole the size of the bunion cut in it. This will remove the pressure. If inflamed it must be poulticed, and if severe be lanced, but this should be done by a medical man. The following ointment is recommended for an inflamed bunion: Iodine, twelve grains; lard, half an ounce well mixed; a portion about the size of a horse-bean to be rubbed gently on the bunion two or three times a day.

G. L.—Bird-lime may be made by boiling linseed oil for some hours, until it becomes a viscous paste.

W. J.—There is no help for it. In the language of Longfellow you must "Suffer and be strong."

E. P.—It means so many types, the letter "n" being used to measure the amount of printed matter on a page.

A. C. D.—Frederick means "rich peace" William "the preserver of many," Peter "a rock," Mary "bitter."

LOTTIN.—To polish shells rub down the rough parts with emery and water, and repeat the rubbing with emery of different degrees of fineness; then finish with buff leather, dressed with rottenstone and oil.

T. P.—Purchase some gliding-size of an artist's colourman, or from a chemist; apply with a brush to the horse-shoe, and then put gold or silver leaf upon it. Dealers in art materials sell what is known as liquid gold and liquid silver, which is intended for the work indicated.

E. P.—Diluted alcohol or ammonia and hot water will do to sponge your silk and your grenadines. Borax and hot water is used for cashmere. Crapes can only be restored by those who make a business of such things. Don't you bother with it for fear of ruining the lace. The hair is a bright brown.

A. H. H.—The art of cutting and polishing diamonds was not discovered until 1470. Up to that time no substance had been found that would grind them; but, by accident, two diamonds having been rubbed together, it was found that they polished each other. This is the origin of the saying, "Diamond cut diamond."

F. M.—A lady with ever so good a voice, and considerable knowledge of music, must devote at least two years to careful training and practice before she will be fitted to sing in public. The salaries of public singers vary so greatly, according to the talent and reputation of each, that it would be impossible for us to give you any fair estimate.

OLD LOVE.

ALAS! dear love, when words of thine
I faint to think of, pressing back the tears that start
Beneath my eye, when these were mine,
I could not sing for very joy of song; my heart,
My lips were dumb; I could but kiss
Thy face, like one whose soul in bliss
Is lost, and mutely blest,
Dear love, thy tenderness.

But now, ah me, that love, sweet love,
Is dead, and you and I alive; I cannot choose
But sing: for know that, far above
All joy, our unavailing grief has power to loose
The spell. In broken words, I fain
Would for awhile the sense of pain
Forget, and only blest
Old love and tenderness. A. H.

X. M. D.—Judging from the facts of the case as given, the young lady thinks more of your brother than of you, although her post-card should have been answered as soon as received. When you meet again, it would not be out of order to ask her why she treated you in such a manner after having promised to inform you as to the condition of the bird presented her.

SARA.—Do not allow the young gentleman to monopolise all your attention, and if he really does return your affection, he will be likely to overcome his bashfulness sufficiently to make an explanation of the state of his feelings when he finds that others desire your society as well as himself. If, on the other hand, he cares less for you than you think, you will bear your disappointment much better when you have someone else on whom to fall back.

T. B. S.—The following is an easy way to make tracing paper. Lay open a quire of large sized paper, and apply with a fine brush (a painter's sash tool serving the purpose well) a coat of varnish, composed of equal parts of Canada balsam and oil of turpentine to the upper side of the first sheet; then hang it on a line, and repeat the operation on the other sheets. If not sufficiently transparent, a second coat of the varnish should be applied as soon as the first has become dry.

C. F. M.—The great lack of vivacity which you perceive at times in yourself is due, in most cases, to physical causes. You should take care to secure the full amount of sleep which you feel you need, and eat only nourishing and wholesome food. If, when you expect to go into society, you feel tired and wearied, try to get an hour or two of perfect rest before going out. Your case is not an uncommon one, and men and women have been known to ruin their lives by resorting to artificial stimulants to raise their spirits, instead of using the safe and simple treatment we recommend.

P. W.—"Raphael's" real name was Raffaello Santi, and he was born in the city of Urbino, March 28, 1483. His father, Giovanni Santi, was a refined and cultivated gentleman, and a poet and painter of considerable repute. Raphael lived and died among friends and without an enemy: he was loved and honoured by brother painters, by patrons and pupils, and by Pope Leo X. and Julius II. He died on Good Friday, April 7, 1520, only thirty-seven years old, having, despite his youth, painted a marvellous number of famous pictures. He took cold while talking with the Pope in one of the cold halls of the Vatican, had a chill and then a fever, and died in a few days.

E. C.—It was not obligatory upon either the ladies or gentlemen, in the case stated, to name a particular day.

D. T. W.—A grisette, according to one authority, is a French tradesman's wife or daughter. According to another, a young labouring girl, given to gaiety; a girl or woman of the working class; or, as we should say, "a work-girl."

G. M.—It would be a good plan not to receive the young man quite so frequently, until he declares his intentions. Do not speak of his failure to recommend himself by greater liberality. Invite other company, and show him that you are entirely independent of him.

E. D.—Buenos Ayres, after Rio de Janeiro, is in nearly all respects the most important city in South America. It has been called the Athens of that country, differing but little from the large cities of the North American and European seaboards. Since 1860 great improvements have been made in the style of its buildings, &c.

J. M. C.—Mount Ararat is venerated by the Armenians from a belief of its being the place on which Noah's ark rested after the Deluge. But Apamea, in Phrygia, 300 miles west of Ararat, claims to be the spot. In Genesis, chapter viii, verse 4, mention is made of Ararat as follows: "And the ark rested on the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month upon the mountains of Ararat."

W. S. T.—The translation of *Le roi est l'etat* is "The king and the state;" *Le roi le veut*, "The king wills it, or will have it so." The latter was the impudent term used by the Kings of France previous to the Revolution. *Le roi s'en avisera*, "The king will consider or think of it," is another French phrase that was used by the same monarchs to express their dissent from any act submitted for their approval, and was considered as an absolute veto (I forbid). The terms were also applied to the acceptance or rejection of Acts of Parliament.

R. S.—The best method of washing flannels after being worn is to cut up a pound of soap (yellow is the best) in thin shavings, and put into a sauceron with three pints of hot water; boil till all the soap is thoroughly dissolved. Turn into a pan till cold, when it will be a firm jelly. When required for use have the wash-tub nearly filled with water, as hot as the hands can bear, and put in enough of the soap jelly to make a good lather, so as to wash the flannel without using any other soap. Take only a few flannels at a time, wash quickly, and take out. Rinse in very hot water, shake well, and dry in the open air, which makes them soft and a good colour.

E. G. S.—1. Screws work far below the surface of the water, and lose less by slip than the paddle wheel. In naval vessels it is common to apply screws of two blades, that they may be hoisted above the water into a "well" when the vessel is under sail, or set with the two blades, directly behind the stern post, when their resistance to the forward motion of the vessel will be comparatively small. In other vessels, and sometimes in full-powered naval vessels, screws of three or four blades are used. The usual form of screw has blades of equal breadth, or slightly widening toward their extremities. In the Griffith screw, which has been much used, the hub is globular and very large. The blades are secured to the hub by flanges, and are bolted on in such a manner that their positions may be changed slightly if desired. The blades are shaped like the section of a peer, the wider part being nearer the hub, and the blades tapering rapidly toward their extremities. 2. The Great Eastern had four paddles and four screw engines.

C. W.—1. Vinegar can be made in three weeks by mixing in the following proportions one quart of treacle and one pint of yeast in three gallons of warm rain water. Put the mixture into a keg or barrel, with the bung-hole open, but protected by gauze against insects. A supply of vinegar can be kept constantly on hand in the following manner: Before a barrel is quite out, fill up the barrel with one gallon of treacle to every eleven gallons of soft water. This mixture will become good vinegar in about three weeks, and can be treated in its turn in the same way. 2. To clean and polish old furniture, take a quart of stale beer or vinegar, put a handful of common salt and a tablespoonful of muriatic acid into it, and boil it for fifteen minutes. It may be kept in a bottle, and warmed when wanted for use. Having previously washed the furniture with soft hot water, to get the dirt off, wash it carefully with the above mixture, and polish with powdered Tripoli and boiled linseed oil. A simpler way to restore furniture is to use a mixture of three parts of linseed oil and one part of spirit of turpentine. Put on with a woollen cloth, and when dry, rub with woollen.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 834, Strand, by J. R. SPENCER; and Printed by WOODFALL and KINDELL, 70 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.